

GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY THROUGH BRITISH EYES



A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

1870–1914

JAMES RETALLACK

GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY THROUGH BRITISH EYES

A Documentary History, 1870–1914

On the eve of the First World War, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was the largest and most powerful socialist party in the world. *German Social Democracy through British Eyes* examines the SPD's rise using British diplomatic reports from Saxony, the third-largest federal state in Imperial Germany and the cradle of the socialist movement in that country.

Rather than focusing on the Anglo-German antagonism leading to the First World War, the book peers into the everyday struggles of German workers to build a political movement and emancipate themselves from the worst features of a modern capitalist system: exploitation, poverty, and injustice. The archival documents, most of which have never been published before, raise the question of how people from one nation view people from another. The documents also illuminate political systems, election practices, and anti-democratic strategies at the local and regional levels, allowing readers to test hypotheses derived only from national-level studies.

This collection of primary sources shows why, despite the inhospitable environment of German authoritarianism, Saxony and Germany were among the most important incubators of socialism.

JAMES RETALLACK is a University Professor in the Department of History at the University of Toronto.

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY THROUGH BRITISH EYES

“Impeccably edited and helpfully annotated and introduced by James Retallack, this is a wonderful collection of detailed reports that has a great deal to tell us about Social Democracy in a leading industrial area of Imperial Germany from its rise in the 1870s up to the outbreak of the First World War, as well as throwing new light on the British consuls who wrote them, their acute observations, their detailed knowledge of local and regional affairs, and their biases and prejudices: an indispensable source for historians of Imperial Germany as well as the British Foreign Office and Anglo-German relations.”

*Sir Richard Evans, Regius Professor Emeritus of History,
University of Cambridge*

“The history of Social Democracy, class conflict, and German politics looks different when seen through the eyes of British diplomats who, between 1870 and 1914, regularly reported back to London from Saxony’s capital, Dresden. Their surveys shed new light on the German Empire, which has recently become controversial again. James Retallack has done an excellent job in editing and introducing them to a broader audience.”

*Jürgen Kocka, Professor Emeritus of the History of the
Industrial World, Free University of Berlin*

“James Retallack’s selections from the reports of British envoys, along with his historical contextualization, detail the rise of the socialist party in the German Second Empire, especially industrial Saxony. Add to this a critical portrayal of German parliamentary and ministerial politics as seen by knowledgeable British diplomats, and the result is a rich representation of popular and elite politics, and of contrasting class and national political cultures.”

*John Breuilly, Professor Emeritus of Nationalism and Ethnicity,
London School of Economics and Political Science*

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Cover illustration: *Tavern Scene*, 1877. In this painting (*Wirtshausszene*) by Ernst Henseler (1852–1940), we get a glimpse into a typical working-class tavern, which is also the setting for a political discussion during a Reichstag election campaign. The election flyer pinned to the wall, titled *Arbeiter!* (*Workers!*), supports candidates of the Social Democratic Workers' Party. Seated opposite his listeners, the solid-looking socialist functionary holds a copy of *Der Volksfreund* (*The People's Friend*) in his left hand. This apparently provides him with the necessary prompts as he informs the others about the main points of his party's platform. The painting underscores the importance of taverns as places where Social Democrats could get the message out to audiences that often consisted, as shown here, of a mix of rural and urban voters, working-class and lower-middle-class Germans. *Source*: Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, Germany / Bridgeman Images.

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*For Markus Mößlang,
pioneer, collaborator, friend*

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Preface

Written during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, this book is about a political movement, Social Democracy, that many Germans in the nineteenth century regarded as a scourge on society. That “scourge” emerged from a tiny germ after mid-century, it mutated repeatedly in the face of efforts to combat it, and it changed prevailing assumptions about how class relations, democratic institutions, and global solidarities thrive or break down.

Before the First World War, as a response to persecution and other forms of exclusion, Social Democrats in Germany practised self-isolation – not by choice but of necessity. They created for themselves a vast network of working-class cultural associations where they could escape the condescension or hostility of the middle and upper classes. There were integrative tendencies too: workers who supported the Social Democratic Party (SPD)¹ were proud of Germany’s place in the world and they were ready to defend it if attacked. They also sought social respectability, often adopting bourgeois manners and dress codes. Yet they were kept apart, at a distance, by more privileged and powerful segments of society, who thought that socialists, like the Jews, still had to demonstrate good intentions and assimilate more successfully before they were welcomed as fully equal partners in society and political life. In the meantime, isolation and containment remained the order of the day. Freeing up society too soon, opening the door to “the reds,” foretold consequences too dark to imagine. After the fighting stopped in 1918, bourgeois Europeans recalibrated their retrospective lenses, but still they could not easily fit Social Democracy into the image of a pre-war *belle époque*.

1 Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (1890 to the present). Footnotes to the “Historical Overview” and to the documents explain earlier names of related associations and parties between 1863 and 1890.

The long history and future prospects of Social Democracy have never been more relevant than today. A leading contender for the 2020 U.S. presidential nomination was a self-described democratic socialist. Yet, at the time of writing, Germany's SPD and Britain's Labour Party are in crisis. Meanwhile, a worldwide recession has brought with it mass unemployment, hunger, and despair. The different health-care choices made by nations in crisis raise new questions about how to keep people safe and who should be on the front lines. Social inequality and climate change are being reconsidered too, because the COVID pandemic has shown that changing social and economic behaviours on a macro scale *could* have benefits for humankind. In truth, though, labour history was already making a comeback before a butterfly flapped its wings over a wet market in Wuhan.

Histories of Social Democracy reflect a wider interest in transnational, comparative, and global perspectives. Job losses, video-conferencing, and small-business advocacy – these experiences have reminded us that work and the *concept* of work are central to our existence and self-worth. Labour history now embraces the history of capitalism, class, race, and ethnicity; of gender construction, the body, and emotions; of education, childhood, and generations. It has also revealed important connections between cultures of commemoration and memory studies. Working-class histories figured centrally in the historical study of everyday life, which proliferated in the 1970s, whereas histories of work, labour, and life cycles have been accelerating since 2000.² In all this, one question has remained especially pertinent: To what extent do labour movements contribute to the emergence of civil society? Against this background, we should not be surprised that a new appreciation of our world's interconnectedness brings to the fore histories that are also interconnected. The present volume adds to such histories by asking how people in one nation look at people in another nation, through prisms of class and ideology, with due attention to institutional and individual factors that shape social movements.

This book examines the history of Germany's Social Democratic movement in the age of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm II. It does so through the eyes of British diplomats who were stationed in

² See, e.g., the International Research Center, "Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History" (re:work), at Humboldt University of Berlin; *Moving the Social: Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements*, published at the Ruhr University Bochum; Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Work in a Modern Society: The German Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective* (New York, 2010); "German Labour History," special issue, *German History* 37, no. 3 (2019).

Germany. The vast majority of documents collected here were written by British envoys accredited to the court of the Kingdom of Saxony. They reported back to the British Foreign Office in London from Saxony's capital, Dresden.

Considering the rise of Social Democracy through a case study of Saxony has many benefits, of which four deserve special mention.

First, Saxony was Imperial Germany's third-largest federal state by population, with about five million inhabitants on the eve of the First World War (that is, almost as large as the population of Scotland or Denmark or Finland today). Saxony was situated to the south of Prussia, Germany's dominant federal state, which constituted roughly two-thirds of the empire's territory and population.

Undergoing phenomenal growth as one of the earliest regions of Germany to industrialize, Saxony already enjoyed an industrial capitalist economy when our story opens in 1870. It may be true that Dresden, nicknamed "Florence on the Elbe," was a rather sleepy state capital, whose Baroque treasures were prized by courtiers and retirees. Leipzig, known as "Little Paris," was dominated by a world-famous university and publishing houses. But British diplomats frequently drew attention to the kingdom's third-largest city, Chemnitz, as "the Saxon Manchester." The comparison was apt: Chemnitz's industrial chimneys spewed as much soot as might be found in any Dickens novel. Christian Mengers, a Saxon journeyman, recalled what he saw when he approached the gates of the "great factory city" early one morning in 1865: "Only a quarter of an hour away, we could still not discern anything of the city itself, for it was completely hidden in a thick veil of smoke and soot. None of us had ever seen anything like it: flakes of the stuff drizzled down on us like black snow."³ Chemnitz's growth was mirrored in countless other Saxon towns and cities. Already Saxony's countryside did not look very rural, because industry, trade, and commerce over-spilled the bounds of its cities. The weavers, miners, toolmakers, and other workers living there would have been hard-pressed to say whether they lived in a rural or urban environment (many of them crossed such a divide every day). Hence the Saxon case allows readers to examine the history of a novel social movement in the nineteenth century in a region where socio-economic conditions already mirrored those of the twentieth.

Second, Saxony was the cradle of German Social Democracy, and on the eve of the First World War, the SPD was by far the largest and most powerful socialist party in the world. Of almost 1.1 million

3 Christian Mengers, *Aus den letzten Tagen der Zunft* (1910), excerpted in Wolfgang Emerich, ed., *Proletarische Lebensläufe*, 2 vols. (Reinbek, 1974), 1:115.



Map 1. The German Empire and the Kingdom of Saxony, 1871–1918. Prussian provinces (vertical shading) and German federal states are shown. The inset for Saxony shows major geographical districts and large cities.

Note: P – Belonging to Prussia; O – Belonging to Oldenburg; M – Belonging to Mecklenburg-Strelitz. © James Retallack

party members in Germany, about 178,000 of them lived in Saxony.⁴ The first political organization of workers was founded in Leipzig in

⁴ According to the census of 1910, Saxony's population represented just 7.4 per cent of the German total, but in 1914 Saxony was home to 16.4 per cent of Social Democratic Party members. See table 12.3 in James Retallack, *Red Saxony: Election Battles and the Spectre of Democracy in Germany, 1860–1918* (Oxford, 2017), 492. In both Saxony and the Reich, women made up about 16 per cent of party members on the eve of the war.

1863, and the leaders who established its rival working-class party in 1869 lived and worked in Leipzig too. (See the “Historical Overview,” below.) Because the rise of a large labour movement was conditioned by many factors besides the growth of factories and the activities of charismatic leaders, Saxon history opens a window on other aspects of social, economic, and political modernization. By the 1870s Saxony was a modern class society, dominated by mainly bourgeois interests. This was true of most of Germany, but politics in Saxony was conspicuously different from politics in Prussia to the north, where conservative interests dominated, or in the states of Bavaria, Württemberg, and Baden to the south and west, where liberal and democratic traditions were stronger. Saxony had a smaller noble class, fewer large estate-owners, and no officers corps comparable to Prussia’s. Nor, of course, did it boast an imperial parliament (Reichstag) or emperor (Kaiser), as did the new German capital, Berlin. As a consequence, one might expect Saxony’s conservative parties to have been weaker than those in Prussia, at least relative to their liberal and socialist rivals. Not so. Prussian conservatives had reason to envy the immense political influence of their party colleagues in Saxony, who were led by Paul Mehnert – the man Germans called “the uncrowned king of Saxony.” Saxony had a weak liberal movement and – being overwhelmingly Protestant – almost no followers of the Catholic Centre Party. To British envoys in Dresden, Saxon burghers seemed as likely as other Germans to accept the arbitrary practices of authoritarian governance but *more* determined to stamp out Social Democracy. When those envoys mused about why this might be so, they took a first step to explaining how socio-economic conditions influence political preferences. With the primary sources provided here, readers can proceed farther along that path toward their own conclusions.

Third, because the opposition between the extreme Left and extreme Right in Saxony was so stark, election battles were fought fiercely and in ways that attracted special interest from foreign observers, including envoys stationed in Dresden by Prussia, Bavaria, Austria, and Russia. Like their counterparts, British diplomats reported on Social Democracy as a political party, as a protest movement, as a great innovator in the art of modern politics, and – contentiously – as a real or a phantom threat to the established order. When they described competitive elections at the national, regional, and local levels, British envoys frequently expressed pride in their own House of Commons and its history, but they also took pains to explain to London’s Foreign Office how differently German elections worked. Supplemented with statistical summaries of election results, the documents in this volume chronicle Social Democracy’s

remarkable growth *and* the strategies deployed by Saxon authorities to repress this “heretical” movement on the hustings, at the ballot box, in the courts, in the streets.

Fourth, focusing on Saxony allows us to draw upon the singular richness of reports written by one diplomat endowed with remarkable political acuity. Britain’s “man” in Dresden, George Strachey,⁵ served in the Saxon capital from 1873 to 1897. Historians can appreciate the serendipity of having such a perspicacious mind observing the rise of Europe’s most powerful social democratic party over a quarter century of its development, just as they must regret that Strachey’s successors in Dresden were, in comparison, lazy and unperceptive. Strachey’s long period of service, the conscientiousness of his reporting, and his unusual interest in Social Democracy (and its repression) produced a set of historical documents whose value is doubly enriched by their comprehensiveness and cohesion. His reports allow us to study the local face of a historic clash between two powerful forces: a movement for the political emancipation of one underprivileged social group, and a system of state repression that reached into the daily lives of working-class families. Through Strachey’s eyes, readers can reconsider the degree to which German civil society adhered to the rule of law and yet – of this Strachey was certain – subverted the principles of liberty, justice, and human compassion.

Although this book came together over a span of eight weeks in the spring of 2020, it has a longer pedigree, which, reviewed briefly, lets me thank colleagues and friends who provided crucial assistance along the way.

Since I began working with British documents on Germany in the early 1990s, my research has been supported by generous research grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and research fellowships from the Killam Program at the Canada Council, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the Gerda Henkel Foundation, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. While I held a visiting professorship at the Otto-Suhr-Institut of the Free University Berlin in 1993–4, thanks to the generosity of my host, Peter Steinbach, I discovered the existence of reports written by the British envoy in Dresden and sent to the London Foreign Office. They resided in the Public Record Office (PRO), Kew, now named The National Archives (TNA). I knew immediately that these reports could help me draw linkages between public opinion, voting habits, and political decision-making at the local, regional, and national levels – all crucial for my book about

5 See the biographical information on Strachey at the end of the introduction.

nineteenth-century German elections.⁶ Between 1995 and 2006 I made a number of trips to London, systematically working my way through every report from Dresden – and some from elsewhere – that pertained to Social Democracy, electoral politics, Saxon government policy, or related issues. These trips, too, depended on colleagues who facilitated research stays in Germany, including Jürgen Kocka (Berlin), Ute Planert (Wuppertal, now Cologne), Peter Steinbach (Berlin), and Bernd Weisbrod (Göttingen, now Berlin). My research in London always depended on lodging, liquor, and selfless friendship provided by Ann Olivarius and Jef McAllister.

Eventually I discovered that scholars at the German Historical Institute, London, were preparing to publish the reports of other British envoys stationed in German capitals, yielding a four-volume set entitled *British Envoys to Germany, 1816–1866*.⁷ One of those scholars, who eventually took the lead in the project, was Markus Mößlang. To Markus I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude for years of advice, assistance, and inspiration. As he worked on this project, Markus and his colleague Torsten Riotte graciously supplied me with scans of reports I could not transcribe or film myself.⁸ Then, while he worked on the two volumes of *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich, 1871–1897*,⁹ Markus followed up with more scans, manuscripts, proofs, and copies of the published books. Kelly McCullough and her staff at the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC, helped me transcribe some of the documents from the Bismarckian era. I was greatly assisted in compiling records covering 1906 to 1914 by Geoff Hamm. Willem-Alexander van't Padje provided me with a digital copy of his Oxford dissertation on two Berlin ambassadors,¹⁰ and my

6 It appeared as James Retallack, *Red Saxony: Election Battles and the Spectre of Democracy in Germany, 1860–1918* (Oxford, 2017). For maps that show *Landtag* and *Reichstag* election results in Saxony and the Reich, see the open access Online Supplement to *Red Saxony* at <http://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>. No attempt has been made in these notes to reflect the breadth of historical scholarship on Imperial Germany, Saxony, or electoral politics in this era.

7 Sabine Freitag, Chris Manias, Markus Mößlang, Torsten Riotte, Hagen Schulze, and Peter Wende, eds., *British Envoys to Germany, 1816–1866*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 2000–10).

8 I have indicated in footnotes where I have seen only transcripts provided to me by Markus Mößlang.

9 *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich, 1871–1897*, 2 vols., vol. 1, 1871–1883, ed. Markus Mößlang and Helen Whatmore, Camden Fifth Series, vol. 51 (Cambridge, 2016); vol. 2, 1884–1897, ed. Markus Mößlang, Camden Fifth Series, vol. 56 (Cambridge, 2019).

10 Willem-Alexander van't Padje, “At the Heart of the Growing Anglo-German Imperialist Rivalry: Two British Ambassadors in Berlin, 1884–1908,” D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 2001.

Toronto colleague Eric Jennings kindly pointed me toward the online holdings of the French Foreign Office – a lead that was followed up by Marc-André Dufour.

I thank Stephen Shapiro at the University of Toronto Press for his early interest in this project and for having the manuscript assessed by three anonymous reviewers. I am grateful to Ian MacKenzie of ParaGraphics for his careful copy-editing, to Robin Studniberg for overseeing the book's production, and to Gavin Wiens for compiling the index. Invaluable input on the draft manuscript was also provided by James M. Brophy, Markus Mößlang, Frank Lorenz Müller, and Andrea Geddes Poole. To Her Majesty's Government I am grateful for permission to use Crown copyright records at The National Archives, Kew.¹¹ I am also pleased to be able to include some reports that were first published in *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich, 1871–1897*. For such permission I am grateful to the volumes' editors, to Daniel Pearce on behalf of Cambridge University Press and the Royal Historical Society, and to Christina von Hodenberg, director of the German Historical Institute, London. Lastly, I wish to thank the many authors, libraries, and picture archives from which I have drawn the illustrations for this book. I welcome any communication from holders of copyright whom I have not been able to reach directly.

These friends and colleagues have provided many years of support and encouragement. I ask that none of them be held responsible for any errors of fact or interpretation that may be found in this book. My greatest debts, as always, are to my children, Stuart and Hanna, and to my first and best reader, Helen E. Graham. At every stage of this project Helen provided indispensable support, even while she was helping the Province of Ontario, the Rose Orchestra, and other community ensembles stay afloat during the remarkable year 2020.

Toronto, August 2021

11 Open Government Licence (OGL) reference TNA1603033518S80.

Note on the Documents

Why were certain documents included in this collection and others excluded? In the preface I explained the value of asking questions about German history by focusing on the Kingdom of Saxony. In the introduction I consider the value of using non-German reportage, in general, to illuminate German developments, and the special insights that British observers provided when they looked across the North Sea (which was called the “German Ocean” by those gazing in the opposite direction). Here I outline other editorial principles I followed to help readers make sense of these primary sources.

Scholars and students who are interested in reading diplomatic reports sent to London from German federal states besides Saxony and for earlier periods should turn to the four-volume work, *British Envoys to Germany, 1816–1866*,¹ and to the two-volume collection, *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich, 1871–1897*.² The present collection excludes reports on countless subjects of interest to historians and of special interest to the British Foreign Office: these deal, for example, with international relations, protective tariffs, and armaments. The temptation was also great to draw upon the broad literature on social democracy as a worldwide movement. Limits of space precluded adding such material, despite its

1 On the *British Envoys* project see James Retallack, “Reform or Revolution? British Envoys to Germany and the Culture of Diplomacy, 1816–1905,” *German History* 31, no. 4 (2013): 550–78.

2 All six volumes of the *British Envoys* project are available online at Cambridge Core, to which most university libraries provide access. So far only the two *Kaiserreich* volumes are covered by an Open Access licence on the website of the German Historical Institute, London. That site includes a digital index and biographical information on all envoys who served in British legations in Germany. The volume introductions are indispensable reading for anyone interested in British relations with Germany from 1816 to 1897. A planned edition covering the years 1867–70 would be immensely welcome.

obvious relevance. I hope the readability of the present edition offsets the disadvantages of not casting my net more widely.

A winding road led me to the British reports in this book. Initially, around the time the Berlin Wall fell, I was working with reports written by the envoys that Germany's federal states exchanged among themselves. I had discovered that the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago held microfilms of files in the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office, then housed in Bonn, now in Berlin. I was allowed to borrow dozens of rolls of microfilm for months on end through interlibrary loan. After purchasing a second-hand microfilm reader-printer and tracking down supplies of thermal paper and chemical toner, I worked through these Foreign Office documents in Toronto over the span of two years.

I focused on reports sent to Berlin by Prussian envoys stationed in Dresden, but I also read reports documenting other states' attempts to repress the Social Democratic Party and its press. On subsequent research trips, I was able to view originals of these and related documents in the German Foreign Office itself and then in state archives in Berlin, Munich, Dresden, and Vienna. Slowly I learned to read such reports against the grain and, through a kind of "historical triangulation,"³ to compare them against each other, taking account of the prejudices of diplomats who reported the same events with very different shadings and conclusions. I realized they could help me in the same way that "situation reports" have helped historians study other eras of German history – for example, using the secret reports commissioned by the exiled leadership of the SPD during the Third Reich to view German society in the 1930s through a different lens.

Those differences piqued my curiosity about how and why the British viewpoint might have been unique. As sometimes happens when a young scholar begins work with unfamiliar sources, I made mistakes when I began working in the Public Record Office, Kew. The only serious mistake was the first – and the luckiest. For my initial visit in 1995, I was limited to five working days during my university's February reading week. Jet-lagged and frantic, I immediately zeroed in on diplomatic reports sent from Saxony to Britain's Foreign Office by ordering up files from the collection labelled FO 215. Although each draft report was written in an unsteady (sometimes illegible) hand, it did not occur to me that the final

3 Besides Retallack, "Reform or Revolution?" see Retallack, "'Something Magical in the Name of Prussia ...' British Perceptions of German Nation Building in the 1860s," in *Germany's Two Unifications: Anticipations, Experiences, Responses*, ed. Ronald Speirs and John Breuilly (Basingstoke, 2005), 139–54.

“fair copy” of the same reports existed at all. But of course they did, because British foreign secretaries and their subordinates demanded reports that could be read easily – and quickly. Eventually I discovered those fair copies in file group FO 68.

To start over using the final versions was daunting enough: I had to transcribe relevant documents by hand if I did not want to order photocopies on huge ledger-sized paper,⁴ which arrived months later with a hefty bill. Only on my last visit was I allowed to photograph documents myself. My initial error had a silver lining, though. By comparing the draft and final copies, I could see how British diplomats toned down or egged up their language when revising their initial drafts. As readers consider reports in this collection where deleted text has been indicated with a struck-through font, they will discover that deleted remarks sometimes proved as revealing as the fair copy – or more so.

Whereas some of the reports in this volume also appear in the *British Envoys* project,⁵ most of the texts are published here in print for the first time, including all documents in [Parts IV](#) and [V](#). The Foreign Office completely reorganized its filing system in 1906, but that too had its advantages: now reports from different parts of Germany on the same subject were filed together. The reports in this volume dating from 1906 to 1914 were taken from a microform collection produced by University Publications of America, containing confidential political correspondence sent to the British Foreign Office from Germany.⁶ This microform edition is held by many university and public libraries, including the John P. Robarts Research Library at the University of Toronto.

I have selected, introduced, and annotated the documents as fully as practicable, to aid future researchers but also to serve the interest of students and non-specialist readers.⁷ Some reports, as one would expect, are

4 Sized 12 × 16.5 inches, approximately the DIN A3 standard.

5 An asterisk at the end of a source citation indicates that the preceding report is published in *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich, 1871–1897*. In such cases, a selection of footnotes included in the published volumes has been used in the present book, either verbatim or in adapted form. I am grateful to the editors for permission to do so.

6 The collection is now available from ProQuest. See the guide entitled *Confidential British Foreign Office Political Correspondence: Germany, Series 1, 1906–1925, Part 1: 1906–1919*, ed. Paul Kesaris (Bethesda, MD, 1995; repr. Bethesda, MD, 2005) (abbreviated in document citations as *BFO-CP*). At the University of Toronto I used FO 371 (“General Correspondence: Political”), microfilm reels 5–49, covering 1906 through 1914.

7 I have preserved the orthography of the original documents, including inconsistent usage of dashes, hyphens, single and double quotation marks, and frequent usage of “it’s” as a possessive pronoun. I have tried to keep use of “[sic]” to a minimum. Only where

quite brief. With longer ones, I have tried to make deletions only where necessary, because these reports offer readers the chance to settle into the diplomat's main points, to appreciate his style, and to register the vehemence of his opinion. I hope both kinds of documents may prove useful – to students who are not presently able to visit German archives, to others seeking unorthodox sources to complement emerging research projects, and to a wider set of readers who want to know more about Germans and their history without yet speaking or reading their language.

These primary sources open a window on the way Social Democrats and their enemies shaped a new political culture in the German Empire between its founding in 1871 and its disappearance in 1918. That political culture was constantly evolving: for contemporary observers it was a moving target. According to different scales, these documents provide instant reflections on crises that came and went in a matter of days or weeks – a “rough draft of history” – yet they also illuminate forces that slowly transformed lived experience and class relations in all layers of society. I have tried to select documents that collectively shine a light both from above and from below, in the hope that complementary perspectives offer socially inflected commentary on ideas and people and movements that changed elite politics into mass politics. Because such crises, perspectives, and commentaries continue to shape global history in the twenty-first century, these documents from one far-flung corner of Germany modestly affirm what has been said about the social history of politics: it should look at society from the bottom up – all the way to the top.

necessary to avoid confusion have I altered original terms, e.g., substituting Mainz for “Mayence” but retaining “Leipsic” and other small variations for Leipzig. I have repeatedly provided first names so that individual documents can stand alone. Biographical details on German individuals are taken mainly from Wilhelm Schröder, ed., *Sozialdemokratische Parlamentarier in den Deutschen Reichs- und Landtagen, 1867–1933* (Düsseldorf, 1995); Bernd Haunfelder, *Die konservativen Abgeordneten des Deutschen Reichstags 1871 bis 1918* (Münster, 2010); Haunfelder, *Die liberalen Abgeordneten des Deutschen Reichstags 1871–1918* (Münster, 2004); and Elvira Döscher and Wolfgang Schröder, eds., *Sächsische Parlamentarier 1869–1918* (Düsseldorf, 2001). For Saxon civil servants, see Thomas Klein, ed., *Sachsen* (Marburg, 1982). For the statistical tables, readers wanting explanatory notes and detailed sources are directed to the corresponding tables in Retallack, *Red Saxony*. A few key resources deserve mention: Gerhard A. Ritter with Merith Niehuss, *Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch. Materialien zur Statistik des Kaiserreichs 1871–1918* (Munich, 1980); Simone Lässig, *Reichstagswahlen im Königreich Sachsen 1871–1912* (Leipzig, 1998); Wolfgang Schröder, *Landtagswahlen im Königreich Sachsen 1869 bis 1895/1896* (Leipzig, 2004); and Carl-Wilhelm Reibel, *Handbuch der Reichstagswahlen 1890–1918. Bündnisse – Ergebnisse – Kandidaten*, 2 vols. (Düsseldorf, 2007). See also the comprehensive Reichstag and Landtag election tables compiled by Valentin Schröder: <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de>.

GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY
THROUGH BRITISH EYES

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Introduction

Social Democracy is a huge subject. How can we narrate its long and complex development? Historians must always tell a particular story – not just any story, not the whole story, and certainly not the one and only *correct* story. The documentary history told here is capacious but not unbounded. Our story centres on (1) the German past, (2) social change, and (3) democratic reform.

The German past fascinates students and the general public principally because of Adolf Hitler, Nazism, and the genocidal war they unleashed in 1939, thereby changing the course of European and world history. As centennial commemorations of the First World War have come and gone, German history has been contentious for another reason. It provides an important key – *how* important is part of the dispute – to unlock the question of why European statesmen opted for war over peace in August 1914. More recently still, in January 2021, the sesquicentennial of the founding of the German Empire provoked a series of public discussions and newspaper editorials in Germany, drawing sharp contrasts between its democratic and authoritarian aspects.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, most of German-speaking Europe fell within the borders of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. That loose conglomeration of kingdoms, principalities, bishoprics (etc.) disappeared in 1806, a victim of the Napoleonic Wars. Next came the German Confederation (1815–66), whose leaders sought security and stability after decades of warfare but whose cohesion was always precarious. Eventually, the great-power rivalry between Prussia in the north and Austria in the south exploded the dream of a larger Germany (*Großdeutschland*) including parts of the Habsburg Empire. There followed the period that falls under our microscope here: the German Empire (*Deutsches Reich*), founded in January 1871 and disappearing along

with the Hohenzollern dynasty in November 1918. Thereafter, in more rapid succession, the borders of the “German nation” moved in and out like an accordion: Weimar Republic, Third Reich, Federal and Democratic Republics, and a reunified Germany in 1990.

One could conceivably describe this history as one of detours and dead ends, but to do so would imply that we should continue to search for the red thread tying German history together from a dubious beginning to a happy end – a success story, genuine and unique. Recent scholars have adopted more sensible approaches. For example, some have taken up Jacques Revel’s concept of “playing with scales” (*jeu d’échelles*), examining the German nation state at the local, regional, national, and transnational levels all at the same time.¹ When viewed this way, Germany between 1871 and 1918 was a community of villages and metropoli, a federation of semi-autonomous states (twenty-five of them), and a Great Power seeking its “place in the sun.” Germans cherished the small-scale rootedness of *Heimat* and yet they were already embedded in globalized networks of exchange where people, goods, and ideas flowed across national borders as though they hardly existed. Their attachment to smaller worlds of endeavour does not mean Germans missed the beat of modernity. Such local attachments could be useful weapons to resist centralizing or polarizing trends, including ones that were virulent at the national or international level. Forging a German nation and a German identity after 1870 was not inexorable, and it was not always benign.

Research of the past fifty years has told us a great deal about how members of Germany’s Protestant majority discriminated against national, religious, and ethnic minorities within its borders – Catholics, Jews, and Poles, above all. Yet we have forgotten much of what scholars of the German labour movement taught us in the 1960s and 1970s, namely, that the 65–70 per cent of Germans who belonged to the “working classes” or “lower orders” also suffered discrimination and repression. Some of those scholars – not all – argued that workers were forced to create an “alternative culture” because the ascendant bourgeoisie (*Bürgertum*) did not welcome them into mainstream society as fully equal citizens. Another view suggests the working classes were “negatively integrated” into Imperial Germany’s political system.² Kaiser Wilhelm II, as he did so

1 See David Blackbourn and James Retallack, “Introduction,” in *Localism, Landscape, and the Ambiguities of Place*, ed. Blackbourn and Retallack (Toronto, 2007), 3–35.

2 Vernon Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture* (New York, 1985); Dieter Groh, *Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus* (Frankfurt a.M., 1973); Groh, *Emanzipation und Integration* (Constance, 1999). Two important new works are Andrew G. Bonnell, *Red Banners, Books and Beer Mugs: The Mental World of German Social Democrats, 1863–1914* (Leiden, 2021); and Amerigo Caruso, “*Blut und Eisen auch im Innern.*”

often, used overheated rhetoric to express such forms of exclusion: on September 2, 1895, he referred to Social Democrats as a “band of traitors” and “a horde of people not worthy to bear the name German.”³ Socialists responded by emphasizing their role – their *leading* role – in the Second International.⁴ For them, Social Democracy was a national, non-national, international, and transnational movement.

Social change in Imperial Germany was one of the era’s most conspicuous features, a direct result of the German economy’s rapid transformation into a modern industrial capitalist system. The take-off to self-sustained economic growth happened before our narrative begins – in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s. By embracing the concept of “proto-industrialization” or taking full account of the pockets of advanced industrial development that appeared in patchwork fashion across Germany – in Silesia, for example, or the Rhineland – one could push the start date of German industrialization closer to the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁵ Reversing the historical telescope also reminds us that industrialization did not produce a large or homogenous phalanx of factory workers overnight – or, indeed, ever. Although the older guild system was already breaking down by mid-century, for decades thereafter skilled workers and craftsmen remained vital in workshops generally employing five or fewer employees. No less important, the history of radical democracy in Germany predates 1870 by a considerable margin. Conservative and liberal burghers in Imperial Germany looked back to 1848 as a time of radicalism and lawlessness, and even after the Communist League disbanded in 1852, many Germans remained fearful of a descent from reform to radicalism to revolution, just as skilled workers were gaining the self-confidence to chart their own political course separate from bourgeois liberals. Workers made a new start when they invited Ferdinand Lassalle to Leipzig to provide a program for their movement. This led to the founding of the General German Workers’ Association in 1863.⁶

Soziale Konflikte, Massenpolitik und Gewalt in Deutschland vor 1914 (Frankfurt a.M., 2021).

3 Cited in John C.G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 3 vols. (Munich, 2001), 2:788. See George Strachey’s report dated September 16, 1895.

4 The Second International (1889–1916) was an organization of socialist and labour parties, formed at the International Workers’ Congress in Paris (July 14–20, 1889), where delegations from twenty countries participated.

5 See James M. Brophy, “The End of the Economic Old Order: The Great Transition, 1750–1860,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, ed. Helmut Walser Smith (Oxford, 2011), 169–94.

6 See further details in the “Historical Overview.”

Nevertheless, the creation of the German Empire in 1871 marked a significant caesura, not only in politics but in social and economic relations and in the development of class antagonisms. Liberal reforms between 1867 and the mid-1870s removed countless financial, legal, and other constraints on German trade and commerce. Traditional limits on the scale and speed of communication and transportation were already being overcome in the 1850s and 1860s, and by the 1890s, Germans stood poised to embark on the “second” industrial revolution (especially in the electrical and petrochemical industries). The rich got richer, and the poor became less poor. This development continued until just before the First World War, with longer periods of boom dominating shorter ones of bust.

The first half of the 1870s brought the best of times, the worst of times – in quick succession. The unexpected influx of five billion francs paid to Germany as reparations after France’s defeat in the War of 1870/1 supercharged investment in new enterprises. Hard upon those “founders’ years” (*Gründerjahre*) of 1871–3, however, came a sudden downturn of the economy as a result of over-speculation, bank crashes, and other shocks to the system. Well before the end of the 1870s, contemporaries were writing dystopian analyses of Germany’s socio-economic predicament. Among the many international and domestic dangers facing the new Reich, some Germans identified the “red threat” as the most acute. Meanwhile, economic modernization and social upheaval were accelerating changes in the relationship between workers and craftsmen, on the one hand, and members of the bourgeoisie, on the other. Class consciousness was barely perceptible among the first group, yet class conflict was becoming palpable as a daily experience, for example in the proliferation of written factory rules (handed down by employers, not negotiated) or the outbreak of spontaneous strikes. The historian Gustav Mayer argued that by the time Prussian King Wilhelm I was proclaimed German emperor on January 18, 1871, the “separation of proletarian from bourgeois democracy in Germany” had already occurred. Mayer’s pronouncement may be too stark but it is broadly correct.⁷



⁷ Gustav Mayer, “Die Trennung der proletarischen von der bürgerlichen Demokratie in Deutschland, 1863–1870” (1912), in Mayer, *Radikalismus, Sozialismus und bürgerliche Demokratie*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Frankfurt a.M., 1969), 108–78. Newer studies such as Thomas Welskopp, *Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit* (Bonn, 2000), and Jürgen Schmidt, *Brüder, Bürger und Genossen* (Bonn, 2018), suggest that, by 1871, “bourgeois democracy” was a misnomer.

Democratic reform was a topic of debate in the Greek city state of Athens. *Plus ça change....* Today, public intellectuals regularly sound the alarm about threats to democracy from populists, demagogues, and far-right movements, not to mention ramifications arising from climate change and terrorism. Some foresee “the end of democracy.” Others, such as Turkey’s president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, take pride in leading an “il-liberal democracy.”

The relationships among monarchy, parliament, a constitution, the rule of law, and “the people” can take many forms, but they are constitutive of democracy. Democratic government, at a minimum, means government responsible to the people. That in turn posits the existence of some established mechanism – normally, the regular election of representative assemblies based on fair procedures and a broad electorate – whereby “the people” choose their political leaders and then choose other leaders to replace them if they feel such a change to be necessary. All too often, though, only one criterion is used to measure the advance (or “triumph”) of modern democracy: the presence or absence of universal suffrage. By this yardstick, Imperial Germany was democratic, full stop⁸ – with the only caveat being that universal suffrage was actually universal *male* suffrage. Leaving gender aside, the suffrage for Germany’s national parliament, the Reichstag, was universal because it was general, equal, direct, and secret.⁹

Foreign observers commented on the incongruity between overlapping electoral systems in the German Empire: universal manhood suffrage for elections to the Reichstag, and restrictive suffrage laws (with eligibility thresholds or with indirect voting) for elections to the *Landtage* (state parliaments) of Germany’s individual federal states or the municipal assemblies that administered its cities. They also paid attention to the ways electoral politics were embedded within a wider network of constitutional, legal, and administrative practices. But they did more than that. Repeatedly and in considerable detail, George Strachey and other envoys described how election campaigns illustrated a distinctive mindset among Germany’s middle and upper classes that stigmatized the working classes as “dangerous to the existing state and society.” Although Strachey did

8 I have addressed what I believe to be the deficiencies of this view in Retallack, *Red Saxony*, and elsewhere.

9 *General* in that (almost) all males over the age of twenty-five were eligible to vote; *equal* because every ballot cast had equal weight; *direct* because voters voted for actual candidates to parliament, not for delegates who then elected such candidates; and *secret* because voters placed a (theoretically) secret ballot in a ballot box (or other container) without the ballot identifying him in any way.

not explicitly label Germany's political culture "undemocratic," he compared it unfavourably to Britain's electoral procedure in many subtle and unsubtle ways. He belittled the tempo and scale of German election campaigning, he decried its unjust judicial system, he explained how Bismarck and his ministers abused freedom of the press, and he documented the manipulation of rights of assembly and association. More broadly still, he reported on German policymaking (and policymakers) as obviously inferior to the practices and people found in the British House of Commons or Whitehall.

British appraisals of German Social Democracy are inexplicable without understanding the step-by-step expansion of the British electorate in the nineteenth century, which provided many of the unspoken assumptions against which diplomats found German political culture lacking.¹⁰ The three British parliamentary reform acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884/5 widened the class of citizens eligible to vote in national elections in a series of steps that satisfied moderate reformers rather than radicals. Each was calculated explicitly to prevent the kind of revolution that British diplomats heard German socialists preaching every day. After the First Reform Act of 1832, six of seven adult males in Britain were still excluded from the vote. Partly for that reason, the Chartist Movement in the 1830s and 1840s generated new pressure for election reform, though it never resulted in the violence or political upheaval found on the Continent in 1848/9. Even after the Second Reform Act of 1867, three of every five adult males were excluded. The Third Reform Act of 1884/5 added some six million voters to the election rolls, but it still fell short of universal suffrage and it excluded all females.¹¹ (The Ballot Act of 1872 had, however, introduced secret balloting.) Only the Representation of the People Act of 1918 enfranchised virtually all British males, though still only a portion of females.

Did British envoys inject an appreciation for their own country's "sensible" approach to democratic reform into their reports back to London? Doubtless they did – usually by implication, but sometimes with concrete comparisons. For example, when Saxony's own parliament expanded its election law in 1868, it was based upon an annual tax payment of at least one thaler (equivalent to three marks), which excluded most adult males. The British chargé d'affaires in Dresden, J. Hume Burnley, agreed with the general effect of the reform. After all, he was used to Britain's

10 Britain and Germany are compared in Daniel Ziblatt, *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy* (Cambridge, 2017).

11 See, *inter alia*, Neal Blewett, "The Franchise in the United Kingdom, 1885–1918," *Past and Present* 32 (1965): 27–56.

culture of privilege and deference, which allowed a narrow political elite to wield power, not only over workers but also over a range of obeisant middle-class civil servants and businessmen. "The fundamental principle that every class interest shall be represented," Burnley reported to London, "has in all material points been adhered to."¹² Possibly Burnley was also thinking of Britain's voting reform of 1867 – which still excluded urban and rural wage-earners but, in the next decade, put wind in the sails of liberal-labour coalitions and may also have nudged Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (and their followers in Germany) to regard universal suffrage as something other than a Bonapartist "snare." In 1869, Burnley noted approvingly that, in Saxony, "the suffrage qualification has been put as low as it possibly can be without calling in the actual proletariat class."¹³ By contrast, George Strachey was constantly on the lookout for schemes whereby a reactionary German government would strike an anti-democratic blow against parliament and the constitution by *taking away* universal male suffrage.

A related issue is important for readers wishing to judge British reactions to the rise of socialism in Germany. Ironically, Strachey devoted scores of reports on the SPD in Germany at a time when no socialist party existed in Britain, whereas his successors and other British diplomats scarcely took note of Social Democracy across the Channel once the power of labour had become meaningful in British politics. Labour unions in Britain were legalized with the Trade Union Act of 1871, which followed the legalization of unions in the North German Confederation by two years.¹⁴ Unions in both countries were led almost exclusively by skilled workers, but semi-skilled and unskilled workers in Britain showed little inclination to join such organizations or form a political party to represent their interests. This began to change in the 1880s, after the founding of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) in 1881. Its leader, Henry M. Hyndman, is occasionally mentioned with dismissiveness in Strachey's reports.¹⁵ The SDF suffered splits in the 1880s, and, as a result of a bloody demonstration in Trafalgar Square in 1887, it acquired a reputation for radicalism and violence out of proportion to its actual size and efficacy.

12 J. Hume Burnley to Lord Stanley, February 26, 1868, The National Archives, FO 68/149.

13 J. Hume Burnley to Earl of Clarendon, October 5, 1869, The National Archives, FO 68/149.

14 See Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Hans-Gerhard Husung, eds., *The Development of Trade Unionism in Great Britain and Germany, 1880–1914* (London, 1985).

15 See, e.g., Strachey's report dated September 25, 1886.

In the meantime, the Liberal Party had begun to endorse some “Lib-Lab” candidates sponsored by trade unions. For many on the British Left, this development seemed more promising than any commitment to Marxist socialism. After the extension of the suffrage in 1884/5, and as the Liberals grew less willing to back Lib-Lab candidates, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) was founded in 1893, led by Keir Hardie. A more moderate variant of labour activism was the Labour Representation Committee, founded in 1900 and led by Ramsay MacDonald. It helped the Liberal Party defeat the Conservatives in the general election of 1906, leading the same year to the formation of the British Labour Party that we know today. Despite the early role of the SDF, Britain’s Labour Party owed much less to Marx’s teachings than the SPD in Germany did: Methodism, Fabianism, and trade-union activism provided a more secure, reformist basis.

These divergent paths contributed to animosity between the German and English workers’ parties: initially the ILP’s membership in the Second International was blocked by the German Social Democrats.¹⁶ Against this background, we should not be surprised to find that members of the Foreign Office in London, despite their general sympathy for Tory governments, did not express much worry that Social Democracy of the Continental type would invade British politics. They were more put off by William Gladstone’s alleged pandering to public opinion with his Midlothian speeches (1878–80) – sometimes cited as the first modern political campaign – and his endorsement of Irish Home Rule (1886), both of which occurred when the fear of Marxist revolution in Germany reached new heights.¹⁷

Between the 1860s and 1914 one can discern a shift in the way British diplomats thought about democracy’s prospects in Germany. When German unification was achieved in 1871 through Bismarck’s so-called revolution from above, British observers worried that Germany was ignoring the safe, sensible British example of a slow, steady expansion of the electorate. George Strachey was something of an outlier here. Certainly he was presumptuous and condescending when reporting on the Germans’

16 See, inter alia, Gerhard A. Ritter, “Die britische Arbeiterbewegung und die II. Internationale 1889–1914,” in *Weltpolitik, Europagedanke, Regionalismus*, ed. Heinz Dollinger, Horst Gründer, and Alwin Hanschmidt (Münster, 1982), 333–62; and Douglas J. Newton, *British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace 1889–1914* (Oxford, 1985).

17 Tellingly, Strachey thought that vigorous campaigning in British elections set them above German practice, and he used the expression “Home Rule” only as a means to explain that Germany’s federal states retained a measure of autonomy even after unification in 1871.

general level of political education. In a report of 1891, he wrote, “It is idle to measure the behaviour of the disputants in this controversy by standards taken from English or French history. The Germans are in the political nursery, and they are now less near to the possession of a recognized constitutional morality, and to the conquest of the virtues of tolerance, magnanimity, and self-assertion than they were 40 year ago.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, Strachey did not distrust the breadth of the Reichstag suffrage or the underprivileged classes it enfranchised. On the contrary: his sympathy with the emancipatory ambitions of the German working classes is palpable in his reports.

By contrast, British envoys stationed in other German capitals were more dismissive or fearful of “the masses” who, they believed, were being duped by Social Democratic agitators. One of them wrote in the early 1870s about the “Agitators of the Social Democratic Party,” their “pernicious principles,” and the laudable resolve shown by Baden’s “liberal and patriotic Government” in resisting their efforts.¹⁹ Almost twenty years later, Britain’s envoy to Württemberg appeared willing to endorse exactly the sort of coup d’état against universal suffrage that Strachey so feared. From Stuttgart he reported on the greatly enlarged Social Democratic caucus in the Reichstag after the general election of February 1890: “This rapid and alarming growth now forms the chief danger threatening Germany. It is evidently the result of the Direct Universal Suffrage rashly given to the Empire in 1871. The only remedy would seem to consist in some gradual reform of that institution.”²⁰

By the last decade before 1914, British views of German democracy had turned 180 degrees. Now, it was the Germans’ unwillingness to embrace democratic reform that frustrated and worried British observers. As readers will discover from documents in Section V, by 1914 it was Prussia’s *refusal* to compromise with democracy – epitomized by resolute defence of its three-class suffrage – that elicited British calls for action to pre-empt revolution. Because diplomatic reports from Dresden were so sparse after Strachey’s retirement in 1897, the reports in [Parts IV](#) and [V](#) of this volume must move beyond the borders of Saxony. This is the only way to consider what British diplomats correctly identified as *the* central question likely to decide Germany’s political future: the contradiction

18 George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, February 21, 1891, cited in *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 2:24.

19 Evan Montagu Baillie to Earl Granville, Darmstadt, June 6, 1872, *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 1:199–200.

20 Henry Barron to Lord Salisbury, Stuttgart, March 4, 1890, *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 2:445.

between a broad national tendency to fairer and broader electoral systems, on the one hand, and the unwillingness of all parties – except the Social Democrats and some left liberals – to reform the reactionary suffrage that sustained Prussia's dominance in the German Empire. Officials in London's Foreign Office believed that failure to reform Prussia's three-class suffrage was a fateful German miscalculation: it might have international ramifications, possibly including a socialist revolution across the North Sea.

Envoys in the minor German missions now generally invoked rote formulations about socialism and its goals. Meanwhile, the British embassy in Berlin understandably focused on Germany's unpredictable emperor and the zigzag foreign policy he and his chancellors pursued to avoid "encirclement" by Britain, France, and Russia.²¹ The SPD and its campaign for a genuinely democratic system largely fell from the purview of British diplomats as hopes for a naval agreement rose and then were disappointed. When Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg – whom British diplomats saw as their best hope to defuse the Anglo-German antagonism – was forced to withdraw his Prussian reform bill of 1910, Eyre Crowe in the Foreign Office noted, "It would be a pity if the position of Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg were to be seriously imperilled [*sic*] by the line he has taken in the Prussian franchise question," to which one of Crowe's colleagues added laconically, "That alone matters as far as we are concerned."²² These men, already deeply suspicious of German *Weltpolitik*, had never held out much hope that Bethmann would succeed with his meagre suffrage bill.

Taking stock, our focus in this volume falls on Germany *and* its constituent parts; on society *and* changing social relations under the impact of rapid modernization; and on democracy as a constitutional system *and* a means of choosing the best possible leaders. In combination, the topic of German Social Democracy covers a range of interrelated issues that are found in headlines today and speak to the concerns of responsible, engaged citizens. Two last points are not too obvious to mention: Among all political parties that existed in Germany before 1914 – a dozen or more – the Social Democratic Party is the only one that has enjoyed an uninterrupted history from that era to ours. And, apart from

21 For the purposes of this book there is no need to cite the voluminous literature on the Anglo-German antagonism or increasing anti-German sentiment in the British Foreign Office after 1900. A good introduction that reviews the central arguments and relevant literature is T.G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind* (Cambridge, 2011).

22 See the Foreign Office minutes attached to Sir Edward Goschen's report of February 15, 1910, in Part V.

the Communists, no other party besides the SPD so fiercely opposed the Nazi seizure of power in 1933.

Historians have long been interested in trying to understand why people choose particular ways to view people in another country. The opinions voiced by members of Britain's diplomatic service certainly cannot be taken to represent a "British" view of Germany. Yet when British envoys penned damning assessments of Germans as a "race" – a term that had fewer negative connotations in the nineteenth century – they did not stand very far outside the mainstream of sociologists, political scientists, philosophers, writers of fiction, and casual travellers, who regularly pronounced on the topic of what made Germans tick. In Victorian England alone, such towering figures as Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot, and Matthew Arnold engaged vigorously with German life and letters, as did lesser figures like W.H. Dawson or Sidney Whitman.²³

To what extent should we as historians criticize the judgment of Britain's diplomatic service when they fell prey to national stereotypes? What allowance should we make for the fact that these envoys found themselves in an unfamiliar land, usually having been uprooted many times from previous postings around the world and typically nearing the end of a civil service career that never quite provided the stepping stone to real influence and good pay? How much do we need to know about the individuals in question to understand the correct or mistaken assessments about Germany that their reports conveyed to the British foreign secretary in London (who, we should note, actually read a surprising proportion of these reports)?²⁴ Can their reports be appreciated by readers today who know how things turned out?

23 See, inter alia, Frank Lorenz Müller, *Britain and the German Question* (Basingstoke, 2002); John R. Davis, *The Victorians and Germany* (Bern, 2007); Günter Hollenberg, *Englisches Interesse am Kaiserreich* (Wiesbaden, 1974); Dominik Geppert and Robert Gerwarth, eds., *Wilhelmine Germany and Edwardian Britain* (Oxford, 2008); Richard Scully, *British Images of Germany* (Basingstoke, 2012); and Steven Wai-Meng Siak, "Germanophilism in Britain: Non-Governmental Elites and the Limits to Anglo-German Antagonism, 1905–1914," Ph.D. diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 1997. Dismissive appraisals of the Saxon "race" are found in Henry Mayhew, *German Life and Manners as Seen in Saxony at the Present Day*, 2 vols. (London, 1864), esp. 1:viii–ix and 2:612; and Julian Hawthorne, *Saxon Studies* (Boston, 1876).

24 Markus Mößlang has noted that almost all dispatches from Saxony – at least for the period up to 1897 – were seen and initialled by the foreign secretary, and a large proportion were sent on to the prime minister or Queen Victoria. Nevertheless, junior clerks (first and second class), senior clerks, parliamentary undersecretaries, permanent undersecretaries, and country specialists (like Eyre Crowe for Germany) acted as gatekeepers in the Foreign Office to limit the upward flow of a potentially overwhelm-

Monographs based on diplomatic reports from Germany are surprisingly sparse, and they have tended to focus either on the decades before 1870 or on foreign policy. Reports from Britain's minor missions in Germany between 1870 and 1914, I would argue, are particularly valuable because they cast a new light on Germans' quest for liberty, equality, and fraternity at home. In 1870, Bismarck could not yet see how the social and political ramifications of universal manhood suffrage would conspire against his plans, which had always given priority to the expansion of Prussian power over unification of Germany as a nation state.²⁵ British envoys picked up immediately on the historical significance of Bismarck's unexpected decision in favour of a democratic suffrage, but they did not leave things there; rather, they began the task of assessing how political associations and parties would adapt to new political opportunities (and challenges). Initially, those envoys sympathized with German liberals, and they praised the German bourgeoisie as it rose to de facto hegemony in the social, economic, and cultural spheres.

Most recent studies of Imperial Germany chronicle these liberal achievements and bourgeois confidence: German burghers score high marks for their willingness to stand up to the authoritarian state, to defend open debate in the public sphere, and to cultivate democratic habits at election time. There is much truth to this. Yet the view from the Kingdom of Saxony offers a useful corrective, questioning the bourgeoisie's commitment to the principles of tolerance, inclusiveness, and political fairness.²⁶ Once George Strachey took up his post in Dresden in late 1873, he became disenchanted with bourgeois liberals as allies of Bismarck and his ministers. With a nod to Gilbert and Sullivan, Strachey referred in 1892 to Germans' desire to subordinate themselves to authority: "Most of the maxims which our own public philosophy affirms are repudiated here. In Germany, it is thought natural that the highest political functions should be entrusted to persons without political knowledge – to a 'Major-General', a desk-official, an Ambassador. Parliamentary experience, and popular influence, are not reckoned among the qualifications

ing quantity of information. See occasional footnotes in this volume for these civil servants' comments (either pencilled as marginalia or, after 1906, attached as "minutes") on the dockets of reports they held back or passed onward.

25 See, inter alia, Andreas Biefang, "Modernität wider Willen. Bemerkungen zur Entstehung des demokratischen Wahlrechts des Kaiserreichs," in Wolfram Pyta and Ludwig Richter, eds., *Gestaltungskraft des Politischen* (Berlin, 1998), 239–59.

26 For a rejoinder to what Isabel V. Hull once called the "rosy revisionism" of recent decades, see Eckart Conze, *Schatten des Kaiserreichs. Die Reichsgründung von 1871 und ihr schwieriges Erbe* (Munich, 2020).

which should be exacted [i.e., expected] from a Prime Minister.”²⁷ In another typical report, this time from 1874, Strachey considered Saxons’ deficiencies to be *German* deficiencies, including “worship of authority” and impatience with “any teaching wh[ich] is not completely dogmatical.” In this instance the real force of Strachey’s critique is found in passages he deleted from his draft. He wrote about “~~the indisposition of the Germans/peculiarities of~~ the nature of the German mind, wh[ich] is content to remain uninformed about minorities ~~until the moment comes for trying to thrash them.~~”²⁸ Only a few months earlier, Strachey had written that “tolerance of dissident opinions is not a German virtue, or ideal.... No one with a tolerable knowledge of Germans ... can be unaware of their ... infirmity of temper, of their impatience of ridicule, sarcasm, and contradiction.... They easily sympathize with systems that punish energetic criticism of public men and measures, and make minorities mute.”²⁹

These passages stand among Strachey’s milder condemnations of the new Germany he saw emerging. The larger point is that Strachey was not under the sway of political opinion in Berlin as he reported on German attempts to balance an authoritarian political system against the effects of socio-economic modernization. Regional parochialism and radical nationalism, he understood, fit hand in glove. Some British envoys continued to hope that Germany as a whole would eventually adopt a liberal parliamentary system.³⁰ Strachey was not one of them. His trepidation about anti-British feeling grew by leaps and bounds, beginning with the Anti-Socialist Law of 1878 and continuing until he retired in 1897 – just when things were about to get worse.

It is difficult to overemphasize the variety of local and regional concerns that were discussed in dispatches from Britain’s minor missions in secondary German capitals. Without the obligation to survey the larger sweep of international relations, these British envoys were instructed to report on the local conditions, temperament, and ambitions of the people

27 George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, March 26, 1892, The National Archives, FO 68/177.

28 George Strachey to Earl of Derby (draft), October 21, 1874, The National Archives, FO 215/34, final version in FO 68/158.

29 George Strachey to Earl of Derby, March 21, 1874, The National Archives, FO 68/158.

30 During his tenure as British ambassador in Berlin, Lord Odo Russell reluctantly abandoned such hope, citing the Germans’ “shit-fear” (*Scheissangst*) of Bismarck; like Strachey, Russell also came to appreciate how little his reports affected Foreign Office policy; see Karina Urbach, *Bismarck’s Favourite Englishman* (London, 1999), 86, 207–9.

among whom they lived. Joseph Archer Crowe, Britain's consul-general in Leipzig, remembered that the first step – though *only* the first – toward learning about such things was to participate in the “real enjoyment and the pleasures of intimate society.”³¹

Lord Odo Russell, Britain's ambassador in Berlin from 1871 to 1884, provided an emphatic rationale for maintaining envoys in the lesser German states. The Foreign Office, Russell observed, would never be able to understand the direction of future German policy unless it realized that such policy was not made in a vacuum in Berlin but depended on the cabinets of Germany's other federal states. It was important for the Foreign Office to get “reliable information as to the tendencies & manner of seeing of those other Cabinets – information which Berlin would be absolutely unable to supply, or I would even say which would be obtained anywhere *rather* than of Berlin.” Because of local jealousies and suspicions between Berlin and the other German capitals, Russell continued, it was “absurd” to suppose “that a British Ambassador at Berlin ... wd. be able alone & of himself to *démeler* the ins & outs of German policy ... unless he had independent eyes working at Munich & Stuttgart & Dresden or at all events one hand in the old Nord[deutscher] Bund & another in the South.”³²

Instead of reporting only on “the ins & outs of German policy,” British envoys stationed in second-rank German capitals interpreted their mandate broadly.³³ In 1870, J. Hume Burnley sent London one of his longest reports (fifty-two pages) on the topic of land tenure: he provided detailed, systematic analysis of the size of Saxon landholdings, crops and yields, the different wages paid to male and female agricultural day labourers, and evictions in the countryside. A short excerpt from this report opens our collection. Burnley, however, missed the mark when he began reporting on the Social Democratic movement in Saxony. In January 1871 he wrote that the progress August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht were making among Saxon workers was due mainly to foreign influences preaching revolution or the “utopian” ideals of workers themselves. “The arrest of the two Saxon Deputies ... is a stern proof that a German Government knows how to put down what may become a disturbing element

31 J.A. Crowe, *Reminiscences of Thirty-Five Years of My Life*, 2nd ed. (London, 1895), 1:414.

32 Russell to William Cartwright,” March 25, 1870, The National Archives, FO 918/55 (emphasis added).

33 Markus Mößlang notes that in the year of Strachey's retirement (1897), four-fifths of all dispatches from Germany emanated from the Berlin embassy; *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 2:11.

unless firmly taken in hand.”³⁴ Readers have already been alerted that George Strachey, Burnley’s successor, saw things very differently. He reported about the wrong-headedness of Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Law, about the legitimate grievances of workers and the human misery that repression produced, and about the witch-hunts that put their leaders on trial. Strachey also criticized the Reich Press Law of 1874, revisions to the German Criminal Code in 1875, celebrations of Sedan Day, the caste mentality of German civil servants, and the arrival of Germany’s most celebrated “Jew-Baiter” in Dresden in December 1879. His first-hand accounts of the social reach of anti-Jewish sentiment and its political potency are among the most compelling documents collected here.³⁵

Dresden was an “official suburb of Berlin” and “probably unsurpassed as a German ‘Ear of Dionysius.’”³⁶ With this argument George Strachey once suggested the importance of maintaining a diplomatic mission in Saxony’s capital. Other European governments might have agreed, though it is hard to be sure. U.S. consuls in smaller Saxon cities spent their time on mundane, parochial tasks. Americans stationed to the U.S. embassy in Berlin had wider horizons, but one of them, Bayard Taylor, endorsed Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Law in 1878. Taylor added with more satisfaction than foresight that “the suppression measures would be enforced in a liberal and charitable spirit.”³⁷ The French foreign ministry – to judge by its diplomatic correspondence from Germany between the turn of the century and 1914 – seldom received reports about Social Democracy. When it did, its diplomats registered an unwelcome truth: German socialists were unlikely

34 Burnley to Earl of Clarendon, January 31, 1871, The National Archives, FO 68/153.

35 See especially Strachey’s reports dated December 20, 1879, December 10, 1892, and June 10, 1893.

36 George Strachey to Lord Derby, January 27, 1875, *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 1:10.

37 Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary Bayard Taylor, Berlin, to U.S. Secretary of State William M. Evarts, November 8, 1878, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park (NARA), Record Group 59, M44, reel 42. The United States maintained consulates in six Saxon cities. NARA, Record Group 59, T-series. See Eberhard Brüning, *Der Konsulat der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika zu Leipzig* (Berlin, 1994); Brüning, “Sachsen mit amerikanischen Augen gesehen. Das Sachsenbild amerikanischer Globetrotter im 19. Jahrhundert,” *Neues Archiv für sächsische Geschichte* 67 (1996): 109–31; Michael Löffler, *Preußens und Sachsens Beziehungen zu den USA während des Sezessionskrieges 1860–1865* (Münster, 1999); Price Collier, *Germany and the Germans from an American Point of View* (Toronto, 1913); Otto Graf zu Stolberg-Wernigerode, *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika im Zeitalter Bismarcks* (Berlin, 1933); and “Imagining Germany from Abroad: The View from Britain and the United States,” special issue, *German History* 26, no. 4 (2008).

to unleash the weapon of a general strike if a European war should erupt. On the contrary, German socialists, with “exasperated pride” in their fatherland, would rush to its defence with “fiery patriotism.”³⁸ Thus reported France’s ambassador in Berlin. The French envoy in Munich – France’s only diplomat in Germany outside Berlin – was equally certain that German socialists would not fail to do their patriotic duty.³⁹ France’s naval attaché in Berlin agreed: “Of course, it would be foolish to believe that the German socialists will raise their rifles in the air the day France and Germany come to blows; but it will be extremely important for the Imperial Government to persuade them ... that we are the aggressors.”⁴⁰

Compared to their British and French colleagues, German-speaking diplomats stationed in Dresden, representing Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, and other German federal states, focused much more intensely on Social Democracy and the means to suppress it. Unsurprisingly, their perspectives and conclusions diverged considerably.⁴¹ These German diplomats – barons and counts, occasionally a prince – were of much higher social standing than most British envoys: court etiquette often excluded British diplomats from attending court balls and other social events where valuable information might be gathered.

The German envoys’ lofty social status, though, goes only so far to explain their lack of sympathy for the working classes and their approval of repressive measures against its parliamentary representatives. The Bavarian and Austrian envoys, representing Catholic countries, typically described Social Democracy as a “heresy” that could best be combated by stiffening the moral fibre of Germans and by reinvigorating a faith in religion. As the number of votes cast for Socialist candidates increased

38 Jules Cambon, Berlin, to Jean Cruppi, Paris, March 7, 1911, Ministère des affaires étrangères. Commission de publication des documents relatifs aux origines de la guerre de 1914, *Documents diplomatiques français 1871–1914*, 2^e série (1901–11), tome XIII (Paris, 1955), 326.

39 Henri Allizé, Munich, to Raymond Poincaré, Paris, August 22, 1912, *Documents diplomatiques français 1871–1914*, 3^e série (1911–14), tome III (Paris, 1931), 324.

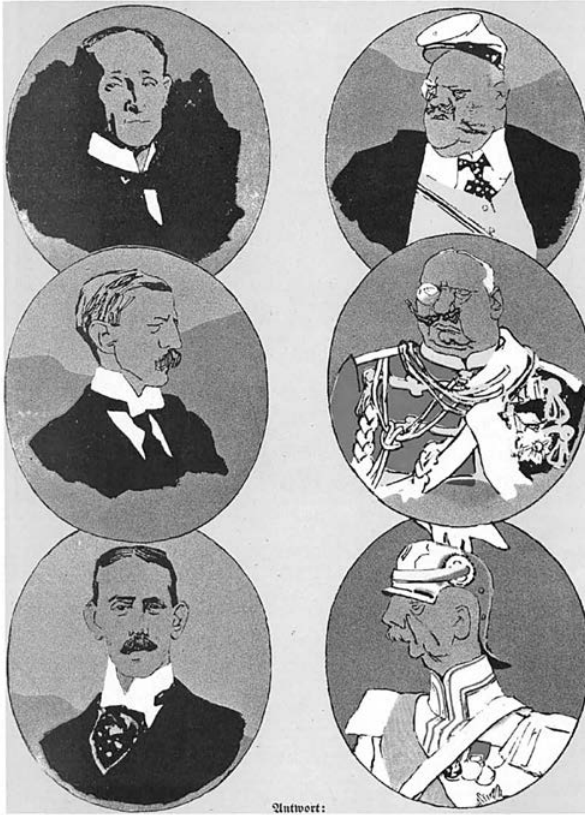
40 Gontran de Faramond de Lajoie, French naval attaché in Berlin, to Pierre Baudin, French naval minister, Paris, March 15, 1913 (Annexe II), *Documents diplomatiques français 1871–1914*, 3^e série (1911–1914), tome VI (Paris, 1933), 21.

41 Diplomatic reports from Dresden to foreign ministries in Berlin, Munich, or Vienna are found in every chapter of Retallack, *Red Saxony*. See also Hans-Joachim Schreck-enbach, “Innerdeutsche Gesandtschaften 1867–1945,” in *Archivar und Historiker* (Berlin-GDR, 1956), 404–28; Otto Esch, *Das Gesandtschaftsrecht der deutschen Einzelstaaten* (Bonn, 1911); Hans Philippi, *Das Königreich Württemberg im Spiegel der preußischen Gesandtschaftsberichte, 1871–1914* (Stuttgart, 1972); Konrad Reiser, *Bayerische Gesandte bei deutschen und ausländischen Regierungen 1871–1918* (Munich, 1968); Hans-Jürgen Kremer, *Das Großherzogtum Baden in der politischen Berichterstattung der preußischen Gesandten 1871–1918*, 2 parts (Stuttgart, 1990–2).

Preisfrage

Woher kommt es, daß die englischen Diplomaten so viel und die deutschen so wenig Erfolg haben?

(Entworfen von E. Thöny)



Antwort:

Der englische Diplomat sieht so aus

Das versteht man alle.

und der deutsche so.

Figure 1. “Prize Question.” Published in one of Germany’s leading satirical magazines, this cartoon asks, “How does it happen that the English diplomats have so much success and the Germans so little?” The answer is provided at the bottom: “The English diplomat looks like *this* ... and the German like *this*. That explains everything.” The cartoon appeared shortly after Germany was forced to back down in the face of British-French opposition during the Second Moroccan Crisis.

Source: Eduard Thöny, “Preisfrage,” *Simplicissimus* 16, no. 38 (December 18, 1911): 684 / Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.

from one election to the next – in both the Reichstag and the Saxon *Landtag* – these German envoys often indulged in hand-wringing. After the Saxon *Landtag* elections of 1881, for example, when August Bebel entered the state parliament for the first time, the Austrian envoy reported to Vienna that Saxon ministers would now face both Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht in the *Landtag*, where they would “continue their rabble-rousing agitation from the speakers’ podium.”⁴² Prussian envoys in Dresden, reporting back to Bismarck and his successors in Berlin, tended to advocate more ruthless measures to meet the “red threat.” Sometimes they echoed Strachey’s opinion that Saxon authorities were half-hearted or inept in combating Social Democracy; but unlike their British colleague they spurred on Saxon ministers, local governors, and leaders of the right-wing parties to adopt more decisive measures to suppress the SPD’s associations and its press. They also wanted Saxons to gag SPD parliamentarians and to coordinate the election campaigns of “state-supporting” candidates in order to defeat a socialist rival.

Only two of these German envoys came close to matching George Strachey’s understanding of Saxon affairs, perhaps because, like him, they served in Dresden for many years. Although their periods of service did not overlap for long, their views on Social Democracy and the possibilities of democratic reform were very different. The first was Count Carl von Dönhoff, who served as Prussian envoy in Dresden from 1879 until 1906. Not long after Bismarck’s dismissal by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1890, Dönhoff expressed a deep concern about the rise of mass politics in Germany. “Those who support the parties of order,” he wrote, “are apathetic and weary of elections.” This did not bode well for the health of Saxon politics. The Reichstag in Berlin was attracting the public’s exclusive attention, Dönhoff noted, whereas “interest politics” were intruding at the local and regional levels of German political life. “From this,” he concluded, “arises the fear that men who represent only a narrow circle of interests and who have no understanding for the issues of state that bear on the general welfare of the people will enter the [Saxon] Landtag.”⁴³ This was a veiled attack on the discriminatory Saxon suffrage, which, in Dönhoff’s view, allowed men of “no understanding” to enter parliament – and therefore was not discriminatory enough.

42 See, inter alia, Baron Rudolf von Gasser to Bavarian Foreign Office, July 16/17, 1881, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich, Abteilung II, Ministerium des Äußern, Nr. 2850; Acting Envoy Sigismund von Rosty to Austrian Foreign Office, August 13, 1881, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Politisches Archiv, Ministerium des Äußern, V Sachsen (Dresden) (hereafter PAV), Karton Nr. 43.

43 Count Carl von Dönhoff to Prussian Minister President Leo von Caprivi, September 24, 1891, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Bonn (now Berlin), Abteilung A, I.A.A.m, Sachsen (Königreich), Nr. 60, Bd. 3.

The second of these envoys represented Bavaria in Dresden: Count Eduard de Garnerin von Montgelas. He served in the Saxon capital from 1903 until 1916. Montgelas was no friend of the Social Democrats, on principle, and yet he understood that the Saxon government's refusal to embrace meaningful democratic reform would not carry the day. When street demonstrations for reform of the Saxon *Landtag* suffrage erupted in violence in November and December 1905 – with copious bloodshed⁴⁴ – Montgelas reported to Munich that the Saxon government simply had no idea how incremental expansion of the suffrage might defuse the mass protests (one Saxon regional governor recalled the feeling of “standing atop a volcano”).⁴⁵ Reflecting Bavaria's greater inclination to work with Social Democrats in parliament when possible, Montgelas was scathingly critical of the Saxon government, which offered only pure obstruction. “The government flatly refuses to draw the logical consequence of the denunciation of the existing [*Landtag*] suffrage,” Montgelas reported back to Munich; “rather, it pushes the responsibility and initiative in this political life-and-death question onto the chamber, thereby ... abdicating [its duty] as a ‘government’ in the true sense of the word.” Saxony's government leader was relying on the support of Prussia to drag his heels “against the will of three-quarters of the population,” wrote Montgelas, using the same tone of exasperation we find so often in Strachey's reports to London.⁴⁶

Even by the standard of his famous, oddball family, George Strachey (1828–1912) was a misfit. To be sure, he exemplified their long tradition of public service and literary associations. He also inherited their “highly methodical” work ethic and their “abrupt social temperament,”⁴⁷ their “great gifts and talents,” and their “capacity to deploy irony and parody.”⁴⁸ In the middle of four generations of highly accomplished family members and living in the age of Great Britain's greatest power, pride, and prosperity, George was almost predestined to a career of “thinking historically.” Yet his reports suggest that he looked to the future, too, in part to Britain's impending decline and Germany's rise. Representing that

44 Which one of Strachey's successors in Dresden barely mentioned. See Lord Hugh Gough's report dated December 4, 1905.

45 Otto von Ehrenstein to Saxon Minister of the Interior Count Georg von Metzsch, August 24, 1903, Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden, Ministerium des Innern, Nr. 5465.

46 Eduard von Montgelas to Bavarian Foreign Ministry (draft), November 29, 1905, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich, Abteilung II, Gesandtschaft Dresden, Nr. 963. Montgelas's perceptive reports underpin the argument of Simone Lässig, *Wahlrechtskampf und Wahlreform in Sachsen (1895–1909)* (Weimar, 1996).

47 Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey* (London, 1994), 4. (This is the abridged single volume of the biography.)

48 William C. Lubenow, “Authority, Honour and the Strachey Family, 1817–1974,” *Historical Research* 76 (2003): 513.

future, and its distinctly twentieth-century embrace of introspection and doubt, two of George's nephews were Lytton Strachey, author of *Eminent Victorians* (1918), and James Strachey, a psychoanalyst, musicologist, and, with his wife Alix, translator of Freud into English. A third nephew was John St. Loe Strachey, who edited the influential London *Spectator* after 1897. Virginia Woolf recalled how the past, present, and future comingled in the family's sense of connection with the British Raj, politics, and literature over centuries. "I felt," she wrote, "that whereas I was living in 1902, they were living in 1774–1902." The family had unique gifts, she added – "honesty, loyalty, intelligence of a spiritual order" – yet she also found her sensibilities teased by a different air at family gatherings, "a vapour, an indescribable taste of dust in the throat, something tickling & irritating as well as tingling and stimulating."⁴⁹ One scholar has characterized the family's history as "a discovery of what it means to be modern," adding, "It was a fragmented and tragic vision whose elements ran against each other in complicated contradictions."⁵⁰ "Portentous" was a favourite Strachey family adjective, and it crops up a half-dozen times in George's reports about the rise of Social Democracy.⁵¹

In most other respects, George Strachey was a singular character.⁵² A Foreign Office note added on the docket of one of Strachey's reports tells part of the story: "Strachey though 'crusty' is decidedly clear, and when he has something practical to write about, he writes well."⁵³ John St. Loe Strachey described his uncle as "a man of great ability, but with a nature better fitted to a man of letters than to an official."⁵⁴ Lytton Strachey's biographer, Michael Holroyd, was less generous on this point: George had "once possessed some aptitude for journalism and diplomacy," but in his later years he "contributed many articles to the *Spectator*, all of them decked in so richly prolix and ornamental a style as to be virtually unreadable."⁵⁵

Readers will reach their own judgments; yet, if they find that Strachey adopted an overly misanthropic tone toward Germany's ruling elites or

49 Cited in Barbara Caine, *From Bombay to Bloomsbury* (Oxford, 2005), 11.

50 Lubenow, "Authority," 523.

51 See Strachey's reports dated November 1, 1884; March 4, 1887; October 25, 1887; February 2, 1888; May 8, 1891; and June 20, 1893.

52 Various Stracheys (but not George) are profiled in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; see also *Burke's Peerage & Baronetage* (London, 2003), 3:3762–4.

53 See Strachey's report dated February 21, 1890. The note was signed T.H.S. (for Thomas Henry Sanderson, permanent undersecretary in the Foreign Office at the time of Strachey's retirement).

54 John St. Loe Strachey, *The Adventure of Living* (New York, 1922), 485.

55 Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, 2 vols. (New York, 1967), 1:29.

if they feel he could have been more concise, they should consider two points. First, writing from Dresden, Strachey was understandably piqued that his diplomatic communiqués were largely ignored by the Foreign Office. In one report, Strachey pleaded his case for conscientious reporting in terms any historian can appreciate: “The present Despatch is, no doubt, crowded with local facts of secondary and transient interest,” he wrote; “I thought, however, that Your Lordship would prefer a study of details, however tedious, to a collection of unsupported generalisations.”⁵⁶ Second, in the 1870s and 1880s, Strachey’s material circumstances and his ability to provide for his family were precarious. This too was a common family experience, as Michael Holroyd has noted: “It was obvious that the Strachey family was in decline. As the Victorian age crept into antiquity and the grumblings of serious reaction to it made themselves heard, they looked around and found themselves stranded.”⁵⁷ One is therefore inclined to believe Lytton Strachey’s recollection that when his Uncle George visited, he presented “an exceedingly peculiar and unprepossessing spectacle, ‘bent double with age and eccentricity, hideously snuffling and pouring out his opinion on architecture to anyone who ventured within his reach.’”⁵⁸

George’s Strachey’s grandfather, Sir Henry, was the 1st Baronet Strachey (created 1801), having served as secretary to the commission that restored peace between Britain and America. By then, Sutton Court, near Bristol in Somerset, had been the family seat for two centuries. George’s father, Sir Edward, was the 2nd Baronet Strachey, and his eldest brother, also Sir Edward, became the 3rd. George’s father, after education at Westminster and St. Andrews – his religion tended strongly to rationalism⁵⁹ – had gone to Bengal as a writer in 1793, where he became a judge and a diplomat, returning to England in 1811. Sir Edward and his wife, Julia, were close friends with James Mill and Thomas Carlyle. In Carlyle’s *Reminiscences*, George’s father is described as a “genially abrupt man,” as “a Utilitarian and Democrat by creed,” and as “a man sharply impatient of pretense, of sham and untruth in all forms.”⁶⁰ These

56 See Strachey’s report dated December 3, 1874.

57 Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, 1:29.

58 Cited in Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, 1:29. Charles Richard Sanders, *The Strachey Family 1588–1932* (New York, 1968), writes, “To his nieces and nephews [George] was an enigma, a talented and clever Mephistopheles lurking in the shadows” (212).

59 According to Barbara Caine, George Strachey’s brother Richard and his wife, Jane, were agnostics: “Religion was not a central ingredient in Strachey childhoods.” *From Bombay to Bloomsbury*, 82.

60 Cited in Sanders, *Strachey Family*, 58, 116–17. See also G. Strachey, “Reminiscences of Carlyle, with Some Unpublished Letters,” *New Review* 9, no. 50 (July 1893):

qualities appear to have been passed on to George, who rarely mentioned religion in his reports and whose conversations with German statesmen – to judge from the diplomatic record – could indeed be “genially abrupt.”

In late August 1828, Thomas Carlyle reported that Mrs. Strachey “has just had the misfortune of – a tenth child.”⁶¹ This was George, born on August 8, 1828, as the youngest of Sir Edward’s Strachey’s six sons.⁶² George’s mother, Julia, was the daughter of Major-General William Kirkpatrick of the Bengal Army. George wrote once that around the time of his father’s death (1832), his mother could read the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, that she had mastered French and Italian, and that she was becoming well acquainted with German.⁶³ Almost all of George’s brothers, like their immediate forebears, were connected with the Bengal service. George’s eldest brother, Edward, suffered an inflammation of the knee joint when he was about to sail for India: forced to use crutches for more than twenty years, he rarely left Sutton Court but was a well-known member of Britain’s nineteenth-century literati.⁶⁴ Somewhat like his younger sibling George, Sir Edward believed that “it is always best to keep old forms as far as possible, and to make the new life seem at least to grow from them, though it can no longer be infused into them. It is our English way.”⁶⁵

George’s second brother, Henry, commanded a battalion of Ghurkhas. The third brother, Sir Richard, whose family is depicted in [figure 2](#), began his career as a subaltern with the East India Company; later he became one of India’s greatest civil engineers. Sir Richard and his large family, which included Lytton Strachey, are the subject of a family biography that brings to life the social world in which George also grew up.⁶⁶

George’s fifth brother, Sir John, was also a household name, who served as finance minister to three successive Indian viceroys and later became an admirer of Garibaldi; but the fourth brother, William, was the strangest of all. He spent only five years in India as a young man, but

17–33. On one visit, the two men discussed Leopold von Ranke and his “literary servility” to the Hohenzollern dynasty: Strachey recalled that “Ranke’s works were not quite dismissed as owl’s droppings, but they were unhandsonely treated” (30).

61 Cited in Sanders, *Strachey Family*, 134.

62 George’s five brothers were born between 1812 and 1823. There was also a sister, Jane; four other girls failed to reach adulthood.

63 Sanders, *Strachey Family*, 119.

64 *Dictionary of National Biography, Supplement*, 1912.

65 Cited in Sanders, *Strachey Family*, 156. See the article on Sir Edward in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

66 Caine, *From Bombay to Bloomsbury*.

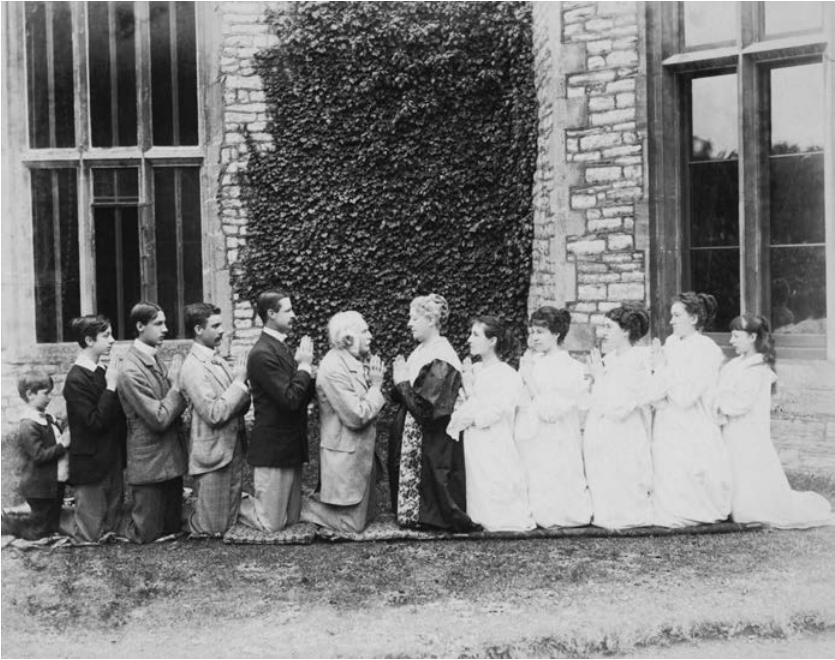


Figure 2. Family of Sir Richard Strachey (older brother of George), ca. 1893. The Richard Strachey children were born between 1859 and 1887.

Source: Photograph by Graystone Bird. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

having once visited Calcutta, he convinced himself that the timepieces there were the only ones in the world to be trusted. As a result he kept his own watch set to Calcutta time, took his breakfast at afternoon tea, and lived most of his waking hours by the light of a candle. Around Sutton Court, the Somerset population came to believe he had great knowledge of astrology.⁶⁷ Michael Holroyd's question, then, is a good one: Were William and George Strachey examples of "thwarted creative talent – or the flower, perhaps, of originality gone to seed?" Did the family's reputation contribute to George's blocked advancement beyond the British legation in Dresden?⁶⁸ We cannot be sure, but the signs are there. Few of Strachey's reports elicited a strong echo when they arrived at the London Foreign Office; most were marked with an "X," that is, "put by" without

67 Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, 1:29–30; Sanders, *Strachey Family*, 211.

68 Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, 1:29.

further action. Either way, a saying circulated among the family's doctors that members of the Strachey clan could never go mad: they were all far too eccentric for that.⁶⁹

George Orwell once declared that he had no doubt whatsoever about which rung of Britain's strict class hierarchy he occupied: "I was born into what you might describe as the lower-upper-middle class."⁷⁰ The Stracheys' social world, by contrast, is "fiendishly difficult to unravel."⁷¹ Put most simply, George Strachey belonged to Britain's minor aristocracy, but he was not far removed from Britain's upper-middle class. His father and eldest brother were baronets, but baronets stand a notch lower than barons: the former had proliferated after the title was inaugurated by James I, when he needed money from Scottish lords. A baronet was socially inferior to all five ranks of the peerage (from low to high: barons, viscounts, earls, marquesses, and dukes).⁷² It is therefore worth repeating that Strachey's rank in Dresden was inferior, first, to most other German and non-German envoys stationed there (e.g., Count Montgelas), second, to his own successors at that legation (e.g., Viscount Gough), and third, to his own ambitions.

Before becoming a diplomat, George went to Totteridge in Hertfordshire, a private preparatory school that placed less emphasis on the classics, though not necessarily less on corporal punishment. Totteridge generally sent its pupils to Westminster (one of Britain's elite public schools, equivalent to private secondary schools in North America). For whatever reason – perhaps funds were scarce after educating the older brothers at various East India Company schools – George did not attend Westminster or any other public school, as far as the record shows. In 1844, at the age of sixteen, George was still editing a school paper he and his friends had founded: *Totteridge's Miscellany*. Four years later, just

69 Sanders, *Strachey Family*, 212. It has been said that one Strachey matriarch grew so deaf that she habitually held a hearing trumpet to her ear – though only when she herself was speaking.

70 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (orig. 1937) (London, 1986), 113. Orwell added, "The upper-middle class, which had its heyday in the 'eighties and 'nineties, with Kipling as its poet laureate, was a sort of mound of wreckage left behind when the tide of Victorian prosperity receded." This layer of society, according to Orwell, lay between £300 and £2,000 a year, leaving Strachey closer to the bottom than the top.

71 Lubenow, "Authority," 528.

72 Edward Lord Strachey (1858–1936) was the 4th Baronet, having inherited the baronetcy in 1901. A Liberal politician, he belonged to the Cabinets of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Henry Asquith between 1905 and 1915. He was raised to the peerage in 1911 when, with a change of spelling, he became the 1st Baron Strachie.

before entering Trinity College at Cambridge for the Michaelmas Term 1848, it was “during an educational residence in London in 1848” that Strachey dropped in for tea with Thomas Carlyle and his wife in Chelsea (perhaps he had engaged a private tutor, or “crammer”).⁷³ With whom he worked at Trinity College or what subjects he read are also unclear, but in 1853 he emerged with a Cambridge BA.

George Strachey’s diplomatic career began at the age of twenty-three, as attaché at St. Petersburg in February 1852 (that is, the year before receiving his BA). This dating means that Strachey had not had to stand the competitive exams for diplomatic service, which were introduced soon thereafter. Temporary postings followed at Hanover (1854), Turin (1855), then as second paid attaché at Vienna (1856). Later in 1856 Strachey passed an examination for a paid attachéship and was appointed at Stuttgart (Württemberg) that November. Subsequent appointments included The Hague (1858–62), Vienna (1863–6), and acting chargé d’affaires at Copenhagen (1866–72). A brief posting in Berne in 1873 preceded Strachey’s appointment as secretary of legation and chargé d’affaires to the court of the Kingdom of Saxony at Dresden on October 25, 1873.⁷⁴ Strachey was already forty-five years old.

His salary – as was usually the case – had to be supplemented from his personal funds.⁷⁵ Within six months of his appointment Strachey was already pleading with the Foreign Office to raise his salary, without success. Burnley, his predecessor, had been appointed in 1867, but since then, Strachey wrote, general prices had risen 30–40 per cent and house prices had doubled.⁷⁶ His financial limitations “and the old spartan style of life” were “no longer compatible with respectability.” Strachey claimed he was often embarrassed – and Britain’s reputation suffered correspondingly – because he could not accept the invitations of other envoys, local German notables, or members of the English community (several hundred) living in Dresden. This was because he could not return the favour: he worked out of his own modest lodgings, comprising

73 G. Strachey, “Carlyle and the Rose-Goddess,” *Nineteenth Century* 32 (1892): 470–86.

74 Details from the *Foreign Office List* (London, 1912), 386; on Strachey’s retirement award, 136.

75 Mößlang in *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 2:7; see also Jones, *Diplomatic Service*, 147–8. Joseph Archer Crowe also complained bitterly about poor pay, inferior rank, and neglect from London while he was Britain’s consul-general in Leipzig and Düsseldorf, where he, too, received £750 per annum; Sibyl Crowe and Edward Corp, *Our Ablest Public Servant: Sir Eyre Crowe, 1864–1925* (Braunton, 1993), 10–11.

76 George Strachey to Earl of Derby, March 18, 1874, The National Archives, FO 68/158.

only four good rooms divided between two storeys of the house, with no chancery and no separate room to receive guests. (Consider that by 1874, Strachey and his wife, Catherine, had three young boys living with them in Dresden, on an annual salary of £500 with an additional allowance of £250.)⁷⁷ By comparison, Strachey added, his colleagues attached to similar missions in southern Germany received salaries of £1,200 to £1,400. His complaint fell on deaf ears in London: his title of *chargé d'affaires* was not upgraded to “minister resident” until December 1890, after almost two decades in Dresden and almost four decades in the diplomatic service. Even then, he was not awarded the corresponding salary increment of £150 until 1893.⁷⁸ (Thus Strachey’s total income might have topped out around the equivalent of £100,000 today, or about US\$140,000.)⁷⁹ Dresden was Strachey’s last diplomatic post: he retired on a pension on July 1, 1897, when he received the Jubilee Medal and a modest supplementary award (£900) for his many years of service. He died on February 25, 1912, at the age of eighty-three.

Did George Strachey and others like him earn their civil service salaries? Strachey would seem to merit a “yes.” Strachey’s obituary in the *Pall Mall Gazette* described him as “one of those erratic geniuses who should have made a brilliant career in the Diplomatic Service” had it not been for “his whimsical sense of the limitations of other people” and “his trenchant wit [used] in the wrong direction.”⁸⁰ So we should not put Strachey on a pedestal. But other questions remain. Did he and other British diplomats understand the revolutionary doctrine of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels?⁸¹ Did they appreciate that Social Democrats in Germany embraced that doctrine belatedly and imperfectly? Could they envision even the outline of a transformed German society that Social Democrats confidently predicted was on the horizon?

77 In June 1857, George Strachey had married his first cousin Anne, daughter of his uncle Richard Strachey; she died childless in January 1858. George then married Catherine, the daughter of Reverend John Bazett Doveton, a rector in Somerset, in 1862. Their sons were Lionel, born 1864; Bertram, born 1865, and William, born 1867. The Stracheys also had three daughters – Margaret, Edith Mary, and Georgina – whose birthdates could not be determined.

78 Noted by Markus Mößlang, *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 2:7.

79 MeasuringWorth.com equates an income of £900 in 1897 – a little less than the average barrister would earn – to £104,400 in 2020.

80 *Pall Mall Gazette*, February 28, 1912, cited in *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 2:25.

81 For one perspective on this question, see James Nicholas Peters, “Anti-Socialism in British Politics ca. 1900–22: The Emergence of a Counter-Ideology,” D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 1992.

Even though Strachey displayed much more initiative and curiosity about Saxon political life than did his successors, there is little evidence that he travelled outward from Dresden to Saxony's other large cities, that he regularly read national newspapers from beyond Saxony's borders, that he spoke directly with Saxony's deputies in the Reichstag or the *Landtag*, or that he had a circle of German colleagues he could persuade to let down their guard – exactly as Joseph Crowe suggested they should. A few reports (not included here) discuss the personalities and peccadillos of other foreign diplomats stationed in Dresden, but from those remarks it appears unlikely that these envoys shared their private thoughts or even liked each other very much. About many other aspects of diplomatic life abroad even Strachey's voluminous correspondence is silent. Of course we should probably expect no more, but Strachey's reports give no hint of his wife's and children's experience in Germany, his daily routine, his leisure pursuits, or the contents of his library. Only his writings for the *Spectator*, the *Cornhill Magazine*, the *Nineteenth Century*, *The Academy*, and the *New Review* – mainly late in his career or after his retirement – permit speculation on the latter question.

Reviewing books on German history or military science, Strachey's style was indeed ornate, but it was also erudite, and the points he made drew directly on his learning and experience. For English readers he frequently drew parallels from the “ins and outs” of German parliamentary life, and he often upbraided correspondents of the London *Times* and other newspapers for their ignorance of German affairs.⁸² In a review of *The German Empire* (1907) by Burt Estes Howard, Strachey implied that the author's understanding of the rise of Social Democracy was not well-informed: “On this we may observe that until the Parliamentary followers of Mr. Keir Hardie muster in a strength of a hundred [in the British House of Commons], their figure will not be the proportional equivalent of the Social Democratic group of the [Reichstag].”⁸³ During his brief posting in Austria in 1866, Strachey penned an article that provided a foretaste of his dislike of haughty Prussian nobles: “As a point of praise, it should be observed that the Austrian noble is by no means the indiscriminate or active accomplice of tyranny and priestcraft. Whoever has glanced at the debates of the Austrian House of Lords, must know that

82 In 1876, Strachey warned the Foreign Office to ignore ill-informed newspaper reports from Germany: “The Germans’ in question are not to be found here, but in the Editors rooms in London.” George Strachey to Lord Derby, November 30, 1876, *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 1:18.

83 “The Construction of the German Empire,” *Spectator* 98, no. 4100 (January 26, 1907): 142. Like most contributions to the *Spectator*, Strachey's articles and reviews were unsigned. A full list is provided by Sanders, *Strachey Family*, 301–3.

compared with the debates in the Upper Prussian Chamber, their tone is almost Mazzinian⁸⁴ and subversive.” He continued: “Austrian loyalty ... has nothing in common with the malignant theories of divine right professed by the Junkerthum of Berlin.”⁸⁵ In such writing, Strachey’s ripostes sometimes provided a wry or ironic comment on his own role. In pointing out the misjudgements of one author, Strachey wrote that a foreign diplomat, however great his natural insight, is necessarily hampered by the “peculiarities of his environment and his horizon”: these make him prone to “portentous blunders.”⁸⁶

This book is about German history, not Britain’s diplomatic service. Yet, as a last introductory observation, we could do no better than to cite the British philosopher Bertrand Russell, from the famous Russell family of statesmen and diplomats.⁸⁷ In February and March 1896 – at the age of twenty-three and almost two decades before he joined the British Labour Party – Russell offered a series of six lectures at the London School of Economics, exploring the forces shaping Germany’s labour movement from within and without. “Political democracy” and “economic collectivism,” he wrote,

are the only demands ... which the Social Democrats are likely to retain if they ever, by a gradual and peaceful development, acquire the supreme power. But if they come into power by a sudden revolution – as they are almost certain to do, unless the ruling classes show a more conciliatory spirit in future – ... then they may, no doubt, like the Jacobins in France, make all manner of foolish and disastrous experiments. For this reason, again, as for

84 Referring to Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72), activist for the unification of Italy, leader of the Italian revolutionary movement in 1848/9, and prominent social-democratic republican.

85 “Good Society in Vienna,” *Cornhill Magazine* 14, no. 83 (November 1866): 640. Strachey was prone to wrap – or conceal – his real allegiances in wordplay. At the outset of this article he wrote that his aim was to provide “a useful commentary on the old Tory postulate that the Austrian nobility is like the English, and the new democratic axiom that aristocracy is a single and identic [*sic*] species of social vermin” (629).

86 G. Strachey, review of C.A. Fyffe, *A History of Modern Europe*, vol. 2, in *The Academy* 777 (March 26, 1887): 213.

87 Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) (3rd Earl Russell), was a British philosopher, logician, mathematician, historian, writer, social critic, political activist, and Nobel laureate. His paternal grandfather was John Russell, 1st Earl Russell, who served as British prime minister from 1846 to 1852 and 1865–6 and was uncle to Lord Odo Russell – after 1881 styled 1st Baron Amphil – Britain’s first ambassador to Imperial Germany.

so many others, it is to be hoped, that in future the principle of class-warfare will find less acceptance, and less ground in the conduct of rulers, than it has found hitherto. ... Friendliness to the working classes, or rather common justice and common humanity, on the part of rulers, seem, to me at least, the great and pressing necessity for Germany's welfare. I would wish, in conclusion, to emphasise the immense importance, for the internal peace of the nation, of every spark of generosity and emancipation from class-consciousness in the governing and propertied classes. This, more than anything else, is to me the lesson of German Politics.⁸⁸

It is impossible to overlook Russell's faith that a violent confrontation between the forces of emancipation and repression was *not* inevitable in Germany. He admired Social Democracy, but, more fervently, he wished that socialism's enemies would demonstrate "common justice" and "common humanity" toward the working classes. He did so in words remarkably similar to those used by George Strachey during the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s.

88 Bertrand Russell, *German Social Democracy* (New York, 1965), 170–1. This edition is an unrevised reprint of the lectures Russell delivered in 1896.

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Historical Overview

The primary sources in this volume reflect choices made by British diplomats stationed in Dresden and other cities of Central Europe – in effect, their best guesses of what the British Foreign Office in London should know about German Social Democracy. Those diplomats excluded or treated only in passing many topics central to labour movement history.

Yet the childhood of Julius Bruhns – a cigar worker in the north German city of Hamburg – reminds us that the growth of Social Democracy depended upon many other developments that British envoys observed with a keen and practised eye: the miserable living conditions and cramped housing endured by workers in the early phases of industrialization; a rapidly changing economy where the structure of work and occupational categories were being transformed; the exploitation of almost all kinds of workers by factory owners and commercial traders; a thirst for self-education and common action among skilled workers and craftsmen; their hesitant formulation of concrete demands for change; their patient practice of the art of public speaking; the constant threat of legal repression and long prison sentences for minor crimes; their resilience in the face of scorn and mockery from their opponents; and their utopian visions of the future. Those visions promised an end to class exploitation, a republican form of government, perhaps even ascent to the highly respected rank of Reichstag deputy – or at least the possibility that tomorrow would be better than today. A short excerpt from Bruhns's memoir describes the second half of the 1860s, when he was five to ten years old:

Outwork flourished in the cigar industry. The manufacturers gave the raw materials to the individual cigar-makers, called outworkers, to take home, thus saving the expense of building their own workrooms with lighting and heating, and also saving the expense of wages for factory foremen.... The peculiar working conditions of the cigar-makers offered a special opportunity for the spread and consolidation of Social-Democratic views.... There was

debate and politicization throughout the day, certainly a lot of nonsense was talked, but also many good, healthy thoughts were expressed. And many a capable leader of Social Democracy laid the groundwork for his later career in this zealous disputation about socialist aspirations and theories.... With all the exuberance of an imaginative, enthusiastic boy, I ... was seized by the zest of the great, sacred struggle against oppression, exploitation, lies, and hypocrisy. I soon threw the monsters and giants, the Indians and other enemies overboard and the knights and other strongman heroes of my childhood fantasies along with them, and dreamed only of becoming a leader of the people, producing gripping articles and flaming speeches, and of fighting for the cause of the people against their enemies.¹

British diplomats reporting from Germany rightly deemed personal experiences like Bruhns's to contribute to class consciousness, which in turn, over time, contributed to the organization of trade unions, the expansion of party activities, the winning of elections, and the struggle for social justice.

For German workers, the European revolutions of 1848/9 and the Communist League Trial of 1852 had not receded entirely from collective memory, but in 1870, Social Democrats could already look back on a decade of remarkable progress.

In the early 1860s, skilled workers and craftsmen were establishing and expanding workers' educational associations² at a rapid pace. These associations were often organized and led by middle-class liberals in the German Progressive Party.³ But those liberals – including members of the National Association⁴ – were unwilling to regard workers as equal partners, mainly because they did not sign on to the liberals' agenda of constitutionalism, parliamentarism, and national unity under Prussian auspices. By 1862 a number of workers' groups had become disaffected with the liberals' exclusionary, patronizing attitude. The central

1 Julius Bruhns, "Es klingt im Sturm ein altes Lied! –" (Stuttgart, 1921), 7–15. Translation by Richard Pettit for *German History in Documents and Images* (hereafter GHDI), vol. 4, sec. 2. On the GHDI mirror sites, documents can be read in English or German: <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org>.

2 *Arbeiterbildungsvereine*.

3 Deutsche Fortschrittspartei, founded in June 1861. In this book, *Fortschritt* or *Fortschrittlich* is translated as "Progressive"; *Freisinn* or *Freisinnige* – a later party grouping – is translated as "Radical." British envoys often used the German terms in their reports.

4 Nationalverein, 1859–67. See Andreas Biefang, *Politisches Bürgertum in Deutschland 1857–1868* (Düsseldorf, 1994).

committee of workers in Leipzig turned to Ferdinand Lassalle,⁵ a Jewish lawyer who had recently gained prominence with his “Workers Program.” They asked him to provide doctrinal leadership, which he did on March 1, 1863, with his “Open Reply Letter” to their request. This led two months later to the founding of the General German Workers’ Association (ADAV).⁶ Lassalle argued that workers had to be ready for revolution – as the liberals were not – to gain political power in Prussia and democratize the state, which would include the setting up of state-sponsored workers’ cooperatives. The first and essential step on this path, according to Lassalle, was to replace Prussia’s reactionary three-class suffrage with universal suffrage.

At a time when Marx’s writings were almost completely unknown in Germany – the first volume of *Das Kapital* appeared only in 1867 – Lassalle’s appeal was profound: it spoke to beleaguered craftsmen (*Handwerker*) who increasingly referred to themselves as “workers” (*Arbeiter*). Such groups included carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, locksmiths, and cigar makers. One element of Lassalle’s teaching was the “iron law of wages,” which argued that employers would always pay workers the absolute minimum wages required for their existence. This law, argued Lassalle, provided further proof that producers’ associations with state credit was the answer to workers’ misery. Lassalle’s inspiration contributed greatly to the organizational expansion of the early labour movement. For help in their battle against new workplace demands and rapacious capitalists, craftsmen and skilled workers were used to looking upward – to the state or to those more educated than themselves. But the direction of that gaze was changing rapidly.

Economic modernization had begun to transform the objective socioeconomic status and the self-perception of craftsmen, on the one hand, and (industrial) (factory) workers, on the other. The latter were a very small minority among the working classes, and they often defined themselves by their learned craft; but the line between the two groups was becoming less distinct with each passing year. Outsiders were not always able to find a new vocabulary to describe these changes. The English term “labour aristocracy” does not do justice to the German situation, for a number of reasons. Some craftsmen were losing the advantages that guilds had provided them in a bygone age and were sinking, or feared sinking, into the ranks of those who did not own their own shop, their

5 Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–64) is recognized as the founder of the first organized party for German workers. For an excerpt from Lassalle’s “Open Reply Letter,” see *GHDI*, vol. 3, sec. 7.

6 Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein, 1863–75.

own capital, or their own tools (what Karl Marx referred to as the means of production). At the same time, most new industrial entrepreneurs, many of whom soon enjoyed much higher levels of social status and material affluence than “mere” craftsmen, had emerged directly from the ranks of skilled workers themselves. Even so, the term “labour aristocracy” captures part of a development that is essential to understanding the genesis of the organized labour movement in Germany, namely, the crucial role played by craftsmen in its founding.⁷

Lassalle was shot and killed in a spectacularly ill-advised duel over a woman in August 1864. By that time certain groups of workers, in Leipzig and elsewhere, were already becoming uncomfortable with his quasi-dictatorial position within the General German Workers’ Association; they also disagreed with his faith in state aid. Meanwhile, a rival organization, the Congress of German Workers’ Associations (VDAV), had been founded in June 1863.⁸ Like its Lassallean counterpart, this organization has a complicated history, but it ended in 1869 and for our purposes can be summarized under two points.

First, the Congress’s highly decentralized structure made it easier for workers and craftsmen in it to continue to cooperate with liberal parties and organizations that sought to keep (or win) their allegiance. At first the Congress did not have a clearly defined program, still less a socialistic or revolutionary one. Its members sympathized with the democratic and *großdeutsch* (larger German) sentiments of the left-liberal German People’s Party⁹ in southwest Germany. But over time, the Congress became more determined to participate actively in politics and to seek a workers’ party completely independent of bourgeois liberals. This trend accelerated when the Congress affiliated itself – in September 1868 at its Nuremberg meeting – with the International Workingmen’s Association (1864–76), often referred to as the First International. The latter stood under Marx’s influence and opposed the pro-Prussian and statist orientation of the Lassalleans. Yet the rival wings of the movement sometimes pursued the same goals, such as recruiting workers into cooperative

7 Members of the ADAV were mostly “semi-independent workers, masters and journeymen in small workshops, and home workers”: Shlomo Na’aman, *Lassalle* (Hanover, 1970), 683. On the German labour movement of the 1860s and early 1870s see Welskopp, *Banner*; and Schmidt, *Brüder*. English readers can turn to Stefan Berger, *Social Democracy and the Working Class in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Germany* (Harlow, 2000), chs. 2–3.

8 Vereinstag [later Verband] Deutscher Arbeitervereine (1863–9). The key scholars in this field are Ilse Fischer, Shlomo Na’aman, Toni Offermann, Dieter Dowe, and Jürgen Kocka.

9 Deutsche Volkspartei, 1868–1910.

movements that over time became more recognizable as modern labour unions. The Congress's contribution to these processes of grass-roots organization and politicization was effectively completed in August 1869 when its leaders founded a new party at a congress in Eisenach: the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany (SDAP).¹⁰

Second, the Congress of German Workers' Associations contributed significantly to the influence and reputation of two men who by 1869 were already the acknowledged leaders of the Eisenach wing and who made the Kingdom of Saxony their central lobbying grounds from the 1860s until 1890. The older of the two men was Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826–1900).¹¹ Born into a family of civil servants and scholars, he was a veteran of the revolutions of 1848/9, having participated in fighting in Baden. After being exiled to London, where he became friends with Marx and Engels, Liebknecht landed in Leipzig in 1865. Over his subsequent career, Liebknecht preached Marxism within the German labour movement, though according to his own lights. Marx and Engels were not shy about complaining from London that Liebknecht's understanding of Marxist theory was muddled, his hatred of Prussia excessive, his tactics unsound. Liebknecht was guilty as charged; but his more important roles in the labour movement were as a practical politician, journalist, and orator. Liebknecht was beloved by common workers: his 1900 funeral procession in Berlin included some fifty thousand mourners.

The second figure was August Bebel (1840–1913). After an impoverished and mainly fatherless childhood, and after spending two years as a journeyman turner (lathe-operator) travelling through Germany and Switzerland, Bebel, aged twenty, had arrived in Leipzig in 1860. Within a few years he had acquired the local citizenship certificate, which allowed him to become a master turner, with his own small workshop at Petersstrasse 18. It also allowed him to marry Julie Otto, who bore him a daughter, Frieda, and who over the following decades supported his business and politics in ways too many to count.¹² Bebel was befriended by Liebknecht, fourteen years his elder, when he arrived in Leipzig. It was never easy for Bebel to pursue his trade as he rose to prominence as chairman of Leipzig's Workers' Education Society (which he had chosen over Lassalle's organization in 1863), and as president of the Congress of German Workers' Associations.

10 Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands, 1869–75.

11 An English-language introduction is Raymond H. Dominick III, *Wilhelm Liebknecht and the Founding of the German Social Democratic Party* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982); see also Wolfgang Schröder, *Wilhelm Liebknecht* (Berlin, 2013).

12 See Ursula Herrmann, ed., *Briefe einer Ehe. August und Julie Bebel* (Bonn, 1997).

By 1867, after co-founding the Saxon People's Party¹³ with Liebknecht, and after winning election to the Reichstag of the North German Confederation to represent a poor weaving district of Saxony, Bebel had emerged as the driving force in Leipzig's working-class culture.¹⁴ His influence and reputation only grew thereafter: during two years in prison, when he was banished from Leipzig, and when he published *Woman and Socialism* (1879) – a crucial piece of propaganda, which, as one of the nineteenth century's bestsellers, allowed him to live mainly from his writing. Even more important in securing Bebel's national reputation were his speaking ability in parliament, his talent for mediating among contending factions within the Social Democratic movement, and his determination to preserve the unity of the party. By 1890 Bebel was the uncontested leader – Lenin called him the *embodiment* – of German Social Democracy.¹⁵ His authority in the party was challenged a number of times, but his role as its symbolic leader was unquestioned: rank-and-file socialists revered him as “the workers' emperor.” Yet still Britain's envoy George Strachey wondered why German authorities feared him so: “Very few Saxons,” he wrote, “are politically educated enough to see that if a Bebel exists he ought to be in parliament.”¹⁶

Bebel's orientation toward the future was grounded in Marx's prognosis of socialism's ultimate victory. But it reflected both the man and his times. The Oxford historian Oliver Zimmer described social change in this era in a way that helps us appreciate not just the misery of the working classes but also the framework within which they became receptive to novel ideas and coordinated action. They did so in a double sense: literally, by occupying new spaces in the emerging nation state after legislation in the 1860s introduced freedom of movement and occupation; and figuratively, by re-evaluating their position in Germany's social hierarchy and political system. “New social and cultural boundaries were drawn, existing patterns of work, trade, and cultural activity were reconfigured, and established practices of demonstrating collective loyalties were altered.”¹⁷

13 Sächsische Volkspartei, founded in Chemnitz in August 1866.

14 See Wolfgang Schröder, *Leipzig – die Wiege der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Berlin, 2010).

15 V.I. Lenin, *Werke*, cited in August Bebel, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften* (hereafter BARS), 10 vols., vols. 1–2 edited by Horst Bartel, Rolf Dlubek, Heinrich Gemkow, and Ursula Herrmann (Berlin-GDR, 1970–8); vols. 3–10 edited by Anneliese Beske, Bärbel Bäuerle, Eckhard Müller, Gustav Seeber, and Walter Wittwer (Munich, 1995–7), 1:i.

16 See Strachey's report dated October 26, 1881. The best English-language biography is now over forty years old: William Harvey Maehl, *August Bebel* (Philadelphia, 1980).

17 Oliver Zimmer, *Remaking the Rhythms of Life* (Oxford, 2013), 2.



Figure 3. August Bebel (1840–1913), photographed in the 1870s.

Source: Author's collection.

The first elections to the Reichstag of the unified German Empire, held on March 3, 1871, were marked by euphoria over France's defeat in the Franco-German War of 1870/1 and German national unity. These factors inclined many potential socialist voters either to remain at home or to choose other candidates over "unpatriotic" Social Democrats. Socialist candidates won only about 124,000 votes, barely more than 3 per cent of all votes cast. Not a single Lassallean was elected, prompting their leader, Johann Baptiste von Schweitzer, to retire from politics. The Eisenachers elected two deputies, August Bebel and Reinhold Schrap, but the party's rather dismal state worsened when Schrap defected to the Progressives in the Reichstag.

By the end of 1871, however, Bebel's and Liebknecht's names were on workers' lips throughout Germany. In July 1870 they had refused to vote for the war credits Bismarck demanded from the Reichstag to fight France. This "treasonous" act was repaid by their arrest, on Bismarck's instructions, in December 1870. Then in May 1871, Bebel rose in the Reichstag to defend the "murderers" and "arsonists" who took over Paris for three months in the spring of 1871. Marx hailed the Paris Commune as the world's first socialist government in history, but the Communards were massacred (roughly twenty thousand of them in a single week) when troops loyal to the new French Republic retook the city. When Bebel spoke on May 25 to defend the Communards and their "revolution" – just as the slaughter in Paris reached its climax – the deputies on the Reichstag's opposite benches were outraged: their hisses and shouts barely allowed him to finish speaking.¹⁸ Subsequently, Bebel and Liebknecht were put on trial on the charge of high treason in a Leipzig court in March 1872. The prosecutor pled his case with trumped-up evidence and the outcome was never really in doubt; but the trial's proceedings, printed each day in national newspapers, became a cause célèbre. Because the prosecutor insisted on having large tracts of socialist literature read into the court transcript, the movement's propaganda was disseminated widely and could not be seized because it was now a matter of public record.

The two-year prison sentence meted out to Bebel and Liebknecht only increased their stature – in Germany and beyond its borders. As they served their term out of sight in a Saxon prison from mid-1872 to mid-1874, their fame grew, but contrasting images emerged. One portrayed Bebel and Liebknecht as martyrs for the Social Democratic cause. This was the genesis of socialist lore about the "heroic period" of the 1870s and 1880s. Another portrayed them as wild anarchists, leading their followers on a rampage against the state using the same weapons – "murder and arson" – as the Communards of Paris. Even two decades later, Bertrand Russell noted that "Social Democrats are persistently regarded by their opponents as a set of vulgar revolutionaries, prepared at any moment, wantonly and for the fun of the thing, to cut their neighbours' throats and cause a temporary reign of terror."¹⁹

The combined membership of Germany's Social Democratic parties stood at about thirty thousand at the end of the 1860s, at a time when

18 See James Retallack, "August Bebel. Ein Sozialdemokrat gegen Eroberungskrieg und 'Verpreuung,'" in *Krieg. Macht. Nation. Wie das deutsche Kaiserreich entstand*, ed. Gerhard Bauer, Katja Protte, Armin Wagner, and Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr (Dresden, 2020), 58–65.

19 Bertrand Russell, *German Social Democracy* (orig. 1896) (New York, 1965), 99.

there were over three million male workers. This shows the very low degree of working-class organization at the time. The war of 1870/1 reduced this membership substantially, as did the recession that began in 1873. Even so, by 1890, membership in the SPD had risen to over three hundred thousand – when the period of its most spectacular growth still lay ahead. On the eve of the First World War, the party numbered approximately 1.1 million members, and its affiliated (“free”) trade unions numbered over 2.5 million members.

Are membership figures the best way to measure Social Democracy’s growth between 1870 and 1914? Perhaps, but contemporaries routinely read it differently. They paid scant attention to the overall membership of the movement (even after its two wings joined in 1875), in part because the active and paid-up membership fluctuated wildly. They looked instead to the votes cast for Social Democratic candidates in Reichstag elections and the number of Reichstag seats held by the party. Both rose inexorably, or seemed to. This point can hardly be overemphasized. The salience of electoral culture was arguably far greater in the nineteenth century than it is today. Regardless whether historians portray them as loyal subjects or active citizens, Germans followed the parliamentary activity of elected deputies very closely: newspapers devoted their front pages to long verbatim reports of Reichstag speeches from the previous day. Towns and villages fêted their representatives when they returned home between parliamentary sessions. And of course Germans’ participation rate in national elections was eye-popping, exceeding 77 per cent as early as 1887. These aspects of German political culture are not easy to square with George Strachey’s repeated assertions of German voter apathy. But besides noting Strachey’s susceptibility to British condescension, one must remember that “treating” (buying votes), election-day violence, and official corruption were more prevalent in British and American elections at this time than in Germany, where voters and government officials alike, despite notable exceptions, actually followed the rules.²⁰ Perhaps where Strachey saw apathy, Germans saw *Ordnung*.

Table 1, below, illustrates both halves of Social Democracy’s rise as a long-term development, which we can conveniently divide in 1890 – the year in which Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was forced from office by Kaiser Wilhelm II, when the Anti-Socialist Law came to an end, and when the Social Democratic Party won more Reichstag votes than any other German party (as it continued to do right up to 1912 and, indeed, to 1932).

20 See Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy* (Princeton, 2000).

Table 1. Social Democracy and Reichstag Elections in the German Empire, 1871–1912

Reichstag election	Election turnout rate (%)	SPD total candidates (no.)	SPD total votes (no.)	SPD share of vote (%)	+/- from previous election (%)	SPD total seats (no.)
March 1871	51.0	93	124,000	3.2		2
January 1874	61.2	162	352,000	6.8	+183.9	9
January 1877	60.6	198	493,000	9.1	+40.1	12
July 1878	63.4	191	437,000	7.6	-11.4	9
October 1881	56.3	172	312,000	6.1	-28.6	12
October 1884	60.6	219	550,000	9.7	+76.3	24
February 1887	77.5	256	763,000	10.1	+38.7	11
February 1890	71.6	342	1,427,000	19.7	+87.0	35
June 1893	72.5	380	1,787,000	23.3	+25.2	44
June 1898	68.1	380	2,107,000	27.2	+17.9	56
June 1903	76.1	392	3,011,000	31.7	+42.9	81
January 1907	84.7	392	3,259,000	29.0	+8.2	43
January 1912	84.9	395	4,250,000	34.8	+30.4	110

Sources: Ritter, *Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch*, 38–40; Peter Steinbach, “Die Entwicklung der deutschen Sozialdemokratie im Kaiserreich im Spiegel der historischen Wahlforschung,” in *Der Aufstieg der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, ed. Gerhard A. Ritter (Munich, 1990), 5–7.

Note: SPD total votes have been rounded.

The party experienced setbacks in 1878 and 1887. On both occasions, Bismarck used a nationalist appeal to the electorate to stigmatize Social Democrats as “enemies of the Reich.” On these occasions, the principal right-of-centre parties – the National Liberals, Free Conservatives, and German Conservatives – attempted to set aside their differences and unite against the “reds.” In 1878, following two assassination attempts on Kaiser Wilhelm I in early May and early June, the Reichstag elections at the end of July saw the election turnout rate jump by almost three percentage points and the Social Democratic vote drop by about 56,000 votes. Its Reichstag caucus fell from twelve to nine members. Even this setback, however, paled in the face of the first major piece of legislation put before the newly elected Reichstag by Bismarck and passed in October 1878: the Anti-Socialist Law, which finally expired at the end of September 1890. The classic study of Social Democracy as an “outlawed party” during

these years describes in broad strokes what George Strachey reported in fine detail to London's Foreign Office.²¹

The second setback occurred in the Reichstag elections of February 1887. This time Bismarck and his press lackeys²² whipped up the German electorate with tales of an imminent war with France. Bismarck's aim, once again, was to create a pliant majority of his three "cartel" parties in the Reichstag, in order to pass a new military bill. He targeted Social Democrats not as assassins but as unpatriotic Germans who refused to grant funds necessary for the defence of the nation. The turnout rate jumped an astounding 17 percentage points, and the non-socialist parties joined forces against Social Democratic candidates well enough to cut the latter's caucus in half, from twenty-four to eleven deputies. However, in 1887 the SPD's vote total actually increased (in part because so many more Germans went to the polls) and so did their share of the overall vote, now a little over 10 per cent. The ability of the party to withstand the persecution of the Anti-Socialist Law can be read from a comparison of Reichstag voting in 1884 and 1890. In just six years, the SPD more than doubled the total number of votes cast for its candidates, to almost 1.5 million in 1890, and it doubled its share of the vote as well, to just under 20 per cent of all ballots cast. Reversing the setback of 1887, its Reichstag caucus grew to thirty-five deputies in 1890.

The Anti-Socialist Law was the most repressive law of Bismarck's chancellorship, but not the only one. Bismarck made several attempts to curtail the growth of German Social Democracy during the 1870s – for instance through restrictions on the press and the revision of Germany's Criminal Code (on which George Strachey also reports at length). Liberals successfully resisted most of these measures. Not so the Anti-Socialist Law they helped pass in October 1878. It banned all Social Democratic associations, meetings, and newspapers. Because the SPD's parliamentary caucus was not barred from the Reichstag – Bismarck did not dare go that far – elections provided the party with a forum for continued agitation. This was supplemented by an underground network of agents, presses, and recreational clubs that clandestinely spread the socialist message,

21 "Law Against the Publicly Dangerous Endeavors of Social Democracy," October 21, 1878. Text in Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party* (Princeton, 1966), appendix C, 339–45, or *GHDI*, vol. 4, sec. 7. The law, commonly referred to as the *Sozialistengesetz*, was initially effective until March 31, 1881. It was renewed four times. In January 1890 the Reichstag narrowly decided not to renew the law, and it expired on September 30, 1890.

22 Though dated, a useful introduction is Robert H. Keyserlingk, *Media Manipulation: The Press and Bismarck in Imperial Germany* (Montreal, 1977).

as Strachey also reported to London. Nevertheless, between 1878 and 1890, about 1,500 people were sentenced to more than 800 years' imprisonment. After 1890, memories of repression and hardship persisted, contributing to Social Democrats' feelings of solidarity and commitment.

Bismarck's social reform legislation in the 1880s was the carrot meant to complement the stick of repression. It did little to win the hearts and minds of Germany's working classes. It may be true that laws introducing health insurance (1883), accident insurance (1884), and provisions for disability and old age (1889) pointed toward the future welfare state; but Bismarck himself admitted that his main objective was to eliminate the threat of Social Democracy. That the party emerged from twelve years of underground existence in 1890 and – even before expiry of the Anti-Socialist Law – won the support of almost 1.5 million Germans, testifies to the resilience of the socialist movement. Even compared to Prussia's “cultural struggle” (*Kulturkampf*) against the Catholic Church during the 1870s, Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Law was his gravest political blunder.

A grass-roots movement that attracted men and women wishing to overcome their strained circumstances in individual workplaces and disparate occupations, Social Democracy grew in German villages and towns that had often little in common with the big cities. It also grew despite municipal, regional, and federal laws limiting socialist activities in myriad ways.²³ This book's Introduction explained why Saxony offers a good opportunity to study Social Democracy's development in Germany, not according to an unhelpful dyad suggesting uniqueness or typicality, but as a case study that opens up new questions about other parts of Germany.²⁴ Comparing Reichstag election results in Saxony with those in Germany as a whole at each general election is a useful enterprise, but first, [table 2](#) below reports Reichstag election results just in Saxony. It covers the entire imperial period, when the Saxon kingdom always sent twenty-three delegates to the 397-member Reichstag. Unlike the preceding table, it suggests even for the 1870s why the “parties of order” (*Ordnungsparteien*) in Saxony began to panic when Social Democrats made electoral breakthroughs in 1874 and again in 1877. Comparing results shown in [tables 1](#) and [2](#) for any given election year

23 Social Democrats complained regularly about the petty but effective “policy of needle-pricks” (*Nadelstichpolitik*) used against their party in the Kingdom of Saxony.

24 Limits of space preclude examination of Social Democracy in its other German strongholds, most notably Berlin, Hamburg, and the Ruhr district. For Düsseldorf, see Mary Nolan, *Social Democracy and Society* (Cambridge, 1981); for Bochum, David Crew, *Town in the Ruhr* (New York, 1979).

Table 2. Social Democracy and Reichstag Elections in the Kingdom of Saxony, 1871–1912

Election year	Election turnout rate (%)	SPD candidates (no.)	SPD total votes (no.)	SPD share of vote (%)	SPD total seats (no.)	SPD share of seats (%)	Run-off ballots contested (no.)	Run-off ballots won (no.)
1871	45.1	18	42,000	19.7	2	8.7	1	0
1874	49.5	22	92,000	35.4	6	26.1	3	1
1877	57.7	22	124,000	37.8	7	30.4	5	1
1878	58.5	23	128,000	37.4	6	26.1	6	4
1881	52.4	21	88,000	28.0	4	17.4	6	4
1884	58.5	23	128,000	35.1	5	21.7	2	1
1887	79.6	23	149,000	28.6	0	0.0	1	0
1890	82.0	23	241,000	42.0	6	26.1	3	0
1893	79.9	23	271,000	45.5	7	30.4	10	0
1898	73.9	23	299,000	49.3	11	47.8	9	4
1903	83.0	23	442,000	58.5	22	95.7	5	4
1907	89.7	23	419,000	48.3	8	34.8	9	0
1912	88.8	23	513,000	54.7	19	82.6	8	4

Source: Gerhard A. Ritter, "Das Wahlrecht und die Wählerschaft der Sozialdemokratie im Königreich Sachsen 1867–1914," in *Aufstieg*, ed. Ritter, 63.

Note: SPD total votes have been rounded.

shows that SPD gains in Saxony far outstripped their average increase across the Reich.

British diplomats deemed the Kingdom of Saxony and its political culture to be dominated by two salient characteristics: the determination of state officials and police to limit Social Democratic activity, and the efforts of all non-socialist parties to join forces at election time to limit the number of SPD candidates elected. These factors did not recede in importance after 1890; far from it. Yet, more clearly than before, the Wilhelmine era in Saxony demonstrated the importance of suffrage questions, particularly the different systems under which voters cast their ballots in Reichstag elections and in elections to the Saxon *Landtag*. Those differences, which now came to the fore in reports sent from Dresden to London, were particularly important for two reasons: they galled Germans who believed that all ballots should be weighted equally in elections for municipal, state, or national parliaments; and they provided Saxony's anti-socialist parties with opportunities to hold back the Social Democratic tide.

After Saxony fought with Austria on the losing side in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, it embarked on a brief liberal era over the next decade. Its *Landtag* reformed itself with a new suffrage law in 1868, which differed from universal manhood suffrage mainly because of an enfranchisement threshold. Eligible electors included adult males who paid at least 1 thaler (soon converted to the equivalent 3 marks) per annum in direct state taxes. Despite this relatively liberal suffrage, the Saxon government turned away from liberalism in the late 1870s – around the same time Bismarck did so in Berlin. During the 1880s Conservatives called the tune in the *Landtag*'s lower house ("second chamber"). However, with each passing year, more low-income Saxons became eligible to vote in *Landtag* elections, as the result of rising wages, inflation, and a new tax code. Voter turnout also increased rapidly. The SPD's caucus in the *Landtag* grew from a single member elected in 1877 to five members in 1887 to fourteen in 1895. Tables 3 and 4, below, show the rise of Social Democracy in Saxon *Landtag* elections between 1869 and 1895, along with the fortunes of the other principal parties in the kingdom.²⁵

By November 1895 these developments had led Conservatives, National Liberals, and the left-liberal Progressives to fear for the future of their parliamentary alliance known as the "Saxon Cartel." They pressured the government to prepare a suffrage reform bill that would prevent a "flood" of SPD deputies into the *Landtag*'s lower chamber. Steered through parliament with immodest haste by the leader of the Conservative Party, Paul Mehnert, a new three-class suffrage was passed into law in March 1896. Very similar to Prussia's reactionary system, the new law was defamed by socialists as "suffrage robbery." It attracted attention beyond Saxony's borders, but Social Democratic outrage had little effect at home. Because one-third of *Landtag* deputies stood for election every two years, and because the new law seriously reduced the weight of votes cast in the third voting class (which included about 80 per cent of voters – the least affluent ones), the SPD deputies gradually disappeared from the *Landtag* until none was left in 1901.

Soon national attention was again focused on Saxony. The general Reichstag election of June 1903 produced socialist victories in twenty-two of twenty-three Saxon constituencies, with SPD candidates winning 59 per cent of the popular vote. The epithet "Red Saxony" was born overnight.

25 Partial re-election of the *Landtag* occurred every two years, with one-third of the eighty *Landtag* seats being contested at any given time. The following tables aggregate, for example, the result of partial (one-third) elections held in 1871, 1873, and 1875 into a single figure: it was only after three partial elections that all eighty seats in the *Landtag* had been contested in a given "round" of elections.

Table 3. *Landtag* Elections in the Kingdom of Saxony, 1869–1893

Election years	Enfranchised electors (no.)	Election turnout (%)	Total SPD votes (no.)	Candidates (no.)		
				SPD	Conser-vatives	National Liberals
1869	245,000	39.8	–	–	66	37
1871, 1873, 1875	276,000	31.4	1,725	4	150	65
1877, 1879, 1881	350,000	31.2	13,263	32	91	35
1883, 1885, 1887	399,000	39.9	32,153	45	75	15
1889, 1891, 1893	484,000	49.5	74,627	72	66	20

Table 4. *Landtag* Elections in the Kingdom of Saxony, 1869–1895 (% of Votes Cast)

Election years	SPD	Conser-vatives	National Liberals	Progressives and Radicals	Liberals	Antisemites
1869*						
1871, 1873, 1875	2.0	46.4	17.1	14.5	17.3	–
1877, 1879, 1881	12.1	48.8	19.2	16.4	2.0	–
1883, 1885, 1887	20.2	50.1	11.2	14.5	2.9	0.3
1889, 1891, 1893	31.1	40.2	12.3	13.3	–	2.5
1895**	32.4	37.2	10.3	8.4	–	11.3

* In the 1869 general election, when all eighty districts were contested, votes were recorded only for the winning candidate, so no percentages can be given.

** In 1895 – the last partial election before the major suffrage reform of 1896 – only one-third of all electoral districts (twenty-seven of eighty-two) were contested. Source for tables 3 and 4: Döscher and Schröder, eds., *Sächsische Parlamentarier*, passim.

Social Democrats protested against the crass anomaly between the number of representatives they sent to the Reichstag and the *Landtag*. Those protests threw Saxon politics into a crisis that lasted six years. In December 1905, workers took to the streets of Leipzig, Dresden, and other cities, demanding suffrage reform. The state's response was brutal: police sabres hacked, protesters' blood flowed. Not long thereafter, in the Reichstag elections of January 1907, the "parties of order" in Saxony struck back. Those parties and Chancellor Bülow's government in Berlin mounted a chauvinist campaign, centred on colonial and anti-socialist themes. It reduced Saxon SPD seats in the Reichstag from twenty-two to eight, although Social Democratic candidates won 50 per cent of the popular vote.

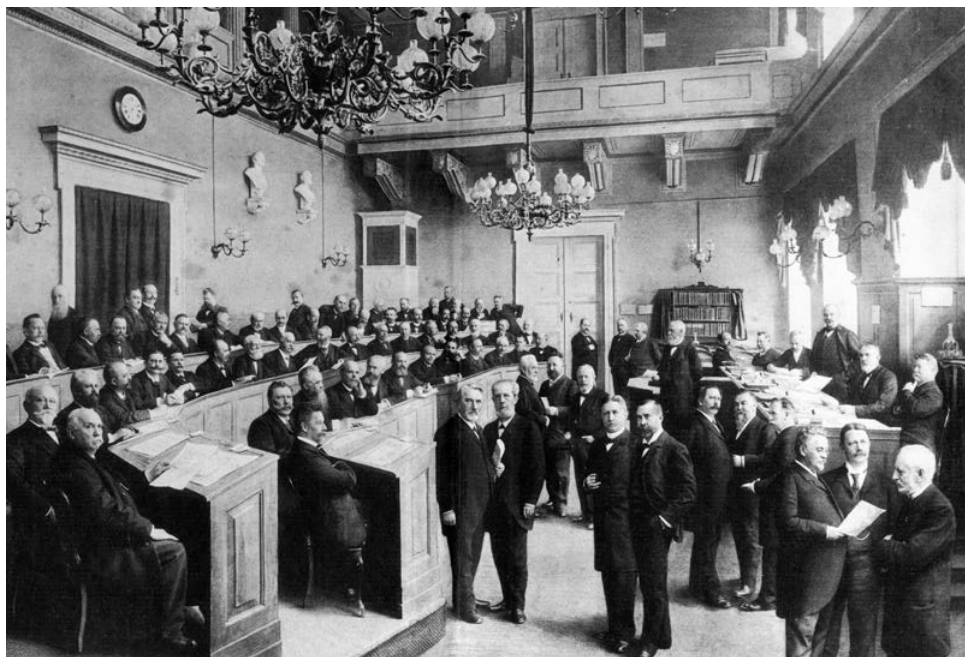


Figure 4. Lower chamber of the Saxon *Landtag*, 1905. Not a single Social Democrat belonged to Saxony's state parliament at this time.

Source: Döscher and Schröder, eds., *Sächsische Parlamentarier*, back endpaper.

Over the next two years, the “parties of order” devised a new suffrage for Saxon *Landtag* elections, which they saw as a relief valve to dissipate pressure generated by working-class anger and by the SPD's massive growth in the kingdom (party membership rose from about 30,000 in 1902 to almost 150,000 in 1912). Passed in January 1909 and tested only once the following October, this new plural suffrage supplemented a *Landtag* elector's “basic” ballot with up to three supplementary ballots, awarded on the basis of income, property ownership, education, and age. Although slightly more equitable than Saxony's three-class suffrage law of 1896, the plural suffrage of 1909 still massively disadvantaged Socialist candidates. In the *Landtag* elections of October 1909, 54 per cent of all voters cast ballots for Social Democratic candidates. But because the vast majority of them had only one ballot to cast, socialist candidates won only 39 per cent of all ballots and only twenty-five of ninety-one seats in the new *Landtag* (see [tables 13](#) and [14](#), included among documents from 1909). Until 1918, no further crises matched the drama of earlier years. Saxon *Landtag* elections were scheduled to be held every six

years, which already dampened political excitement; then the First World War intervened. The government postponed the next *Landtag* election until after the war – which it presumed would end with a German victory.

Returning to the national stage, the German labour movement after 1890 experienced rapid change and expansion, especially in the Free Trade Unions and socialist cultural associations (gymnastic clubs and choral societies, for example). These impressive gains were partly the result of the lifting of legal repression. The party was undergoing other changes too. It was renamed the Social Democratic Party of Germany at the Halle Congress in October 1890, held barely a fortnight after the expiry of the Anti-Socialist Law. A party executive was set up, together with a control commission, to ensure continuity between annual congresses and to which the Reichstag caucus rendered account of its activities. By 1892, August Bebel and his close colleague Paul Singer stood atop the party's executive.

By the next party congress at Erfurt in 1891, the compromise program agreed between the Lassalleans and Eisenachers at the Gotha Congress of 1875 no longer suited the party's needs. Party theory had changed during the years of persecution: general knowledge of Marx's teachings had spread, at least among the intellectual leadership, and the theory of revolution – which had provided a lifeline to embattled party functionaries during the 1880s who had little else to cling to – could now be acknowledged forthrightly. Friedrich Engels was delighted after the new program was approved – with little discussion – at Erfurt, noting that the last remnant of Lassalleanism had been removed.²⁶

Engels was guilty of wishful thinking. The first part of the Erfurt program, on which Engels and Karl Kautsky²⁷ collaborated, presented a theoretically resolute version of Marx's doctrine: it postulated that the laws of nature foretold the breakdown of capitalist society and the coming of a revolution, for which the party could wait without needing to instigate revolutionary action on the anarchist model. As Kautsky later declared, the SPD had become "a revolutionary party, but not a revolution-making one." The second part of the Erfurt program, drafted

26 See *Protokoll des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands: Abgehalten zu Erfurt vom 14. bis 20. Oktober 1891* (Berlin, 1891). An excerpt (3–6) is found in *GHDI*, vol. 5, sec. 5.

27 Karl Kautsky (1854–1938) was a Czech-Austrian philosopher, journalist, and Marxist theoretician. He was recognized as one of the most authoritative promulgators of orthodox Marxism after the death of Engels in 1895 and, along with Bebel, he represented the mainstream of the party.

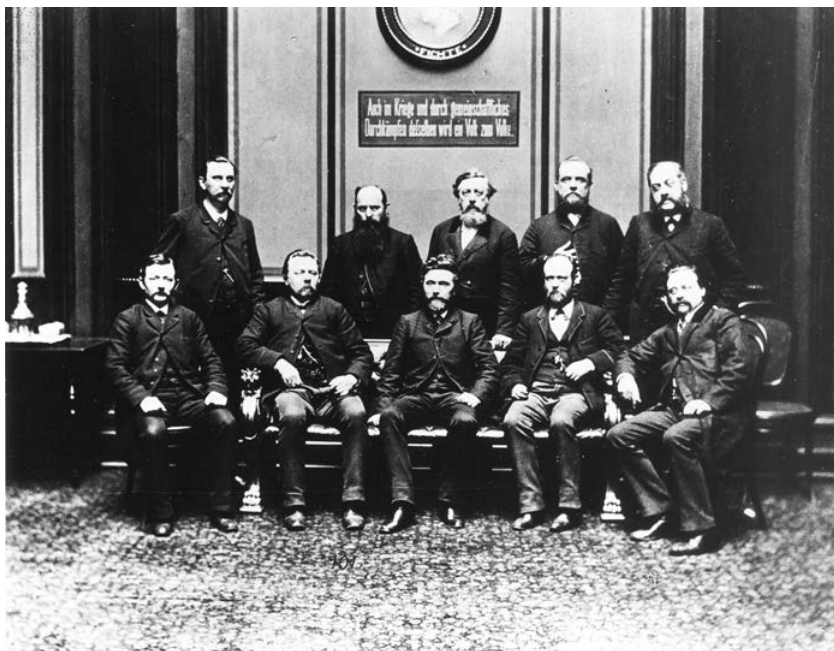


Figure 5. Social Democratic Reichstag deputies, 1889. Not coincidentally, this photograph centres on August Bebel (*seated*) and Wilhelm Liebknecht (*standing*). Paul Singer is standing at far right. This photograph by Julius Braatz was taken in the foyer of the Reichstag.

Source: Author's collection.

by Eduard Bernstein,²⁸ addressed everyday problems of immediate interest to the working classes and stated the party's concrete demands. It was a very long list, including abolition of the standing professional army in favour of a "people's army"; universal suffrage (for men and women), not only for the Reichstag but for all state parliaments and municipal assemblies; free medical care and free education; graduated taxes on income, property, and inheritances; removal of indirect taxes on consumer items like tobacco and schnapps, which weighed on working-class budgets; an eight-hour working day; and more rigorous state inspection of factories. These demands were made on behalf of the working classes,

28 Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932) had held close relations with Marx and Engels, but he saw flaws in Marxist thinking and soon began to challenge the Marxist materialist theory of history. See also below.

certainly, but they were crafted to appeal to members of the lower-middle classes (*Mittelstand*) and others who – to judge by election returns – already regarded the SPD as their protest party of choice.

It was partly for that reason that the two parts of the Erfurt Program were so important and remained unchanged until 1918. The dualism between the theoretical, Marxist, revolutionary content of the first part and the practical demands of the second part was too obvious to overlook. When, after 1891, critics of the programmatic status quo argued that the party, in effect, was falling between two stools, August Bebel, Karl Kautsky, and other centrists replied – implicitly – that the two parts complemented each other. As discrimination continued against Social Democrats in the Wilhelmine era, the theoretical hope that revolution was around the corner was a potent one: it allowed organizational energies to be focused, and election triumphs to be celebrated, as steps along the path to an eventual Social Democratic majority in the Reichstag, after which anything might be possible. Meanwhile, it made sense to calibrate the party's concrete demands to an expanding economy, to administrative practices that intruded more fundamentally (but not necessarily in unwelcome ways) into everyday life, and to the wishes of trade unionists and others who wanted workers to share in a greater portion of Germany's prosperity.

One symptom of this new outlook was endorsed by August Bebel. Openly and in a way that accurately reflected the view of millions of German workers, Bebel declared that he would be willing to shoulder a rifle in defence of his fatherland if it were attacked. This despite his criticism of colonial practices, the abuse of military recruits, and rattling sabres with European neighbours. Thus Social Democrats lived – comfortably or not – within two identities: one identified them as enemies of the existing order of state and society and unworthy of integration into either (as in the 1880s), while the other sought integration into hierarchies of status, wealth, and power. SPD leaders conceded that those hierarchies remained unfair, but they did not need to be “overthrown”²⁹ for the working classes to thrive and feel genuine affection for their country.

Evidence that Social Democrats were “opting in” to mainstream society without “selling out” their ideological principles increased after 1900. Bolstered by the increasingly influential Free Trade Unions, the appeal of reformism within the movement became clear and powerful, even though the counterculture that had been so necessary in the 1880s did not disappear. Reformists like Georg von Vollmar, the SPD leader in

29 Social Democracy's enemies consistently described it as an “*Umsturzpartei*” – a party dedicated to the overthrow, or toppling, of state and society.

Bavaria, were not primarily theoretically inclined. Thus they are to be distinguished from two groups who found a place closer to the far edges of the spectrum of opinion within the party.

At one end – sometimes labelled the right wing of the party – were the “revisionists,” led by Eduard Bernstein, who wanted to revise the theoretical foundation that Kautsky had given the party in the first part of the Erfurt Program. After 1899 the revisionists represented the most obvious and dangerous challenge to Bebel’s authority in the party.³⁰ Bernstein, after publishing a series of articles in the 1890s, outlined the essential elements of SPD revisionism in a book titled *The Premises of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy* in 1899. He was concerned principally with refuting Marx’s predictions about the imminent and inevitable demise of capitalism, and he attacked “*attentisme*” – the policy of waiting for a future revolution while ignoring measures to improve workers’ lives in the near term. Instead Bernstein described how, and in what order, incremental changes toward socialism might be implemented.

On the left wing of the party stood Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (son of Wilhelm Liebknecht). In an essay entitled “Social Reform or Revolution” (1899), Luxemburg declared herself unequivocally opposed to Bernstein’s revisionism because it threatened the proletarian character of the party. Instead she insisted on the “hammer blow” of revolution as the necessary spark to achieve a socialist society.³¹ Influenced by lack of success in reforming the Prussian three-class suffrage, minimal progress in achieving equal legal and political rights for women, and the Russian Revolution of 1905, Luxemburg urgently propagated the idea of the political mass strike: she regarded it as a kind of political dynamite, certain to set off a revolutionary explosion. No mass strike ever materialized, but street violence broke out between police and SPD demonstrators in 1905, 1908, and 1910, mainly over suffrage issues. These protests were massive in scale.³² From the police brutality and bloodshed that

30 It is best to start with Bernstein’s trumpet call itself: *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* (Stuttgart, 1899). An easily available translation from Pantianos Classics is titled *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation* (n.p., 2018). Seminal works on the topic include Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917* (Cambridge MA, 1955); Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism* (New York, 1962); and Dieter Groh, *Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus* (Frankfurt a.M., 1973).

31 Rosa Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, 1893–1905 (Berlin, 1990), 369–71; see *GHDI*, vol. 5, sec. 5.

32 See Berndt Jürgen Warneken, ed., *Als die Deutschen demonstrieren lernten* (Tübingen, 1986); Thomas Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik* (Berlin, 1995).

resulted, it is clear that Social Democrats were willing to risk life and limb as they fought for equitable rights.

Between 1905 and the last party congress before the First World War – at Jena, in 1913 – Luxemburg and those who thought like her faced insurmountable opposition from Carl Legien and the leaders of the Free Trade Unions. Union functionaries feared that their decades of hard work building up a strong organization and winning piecemeal improvements in the life of ordinary workers could be gambled away by a spontaneous, ill-prepared, and likely unsuccessful uprising by “the masses.” By this point, Bebel and other centrist leaders of the party had come to the same conclusion, so it wasn’t just a matter of union bosses dragging their heels. The vast network of local party institutions, practices, networks, and property – the party owned publishing houses, workers’ hostels, and profitable newspapers – counted strongly against testing the determination of the police, the army, and other institutions of state to crush open revolt. To be clear: Social Democrats were not *disinterested* in the prospect of revolution; that prospect continued to exert a powerful spell on millions of Germans who had little else to look forward to. Moreover, SPD leaders recognized the hazard of distancing themselves from the cornerstone of Marx’s scientific determinism. But they were *disinclined* to risk losing something that did not need to be gambled in the first place.³³

From afar, Bebel and his like-minded colleagues were criticized for the policy of waiting for a revolution that never came. At the Amsterdam congress of the Second International in 1904, the French socialist leader Jean Jaurès, although a friend of Bebel’s, mocked the German Social Democrats’ inability to translate the three million Reichstag votes they had won the year before into concrete action.³⁴ Looking back with the benefit of hindsight – in light of the Social Democrats’ decision to support the war in August 1914 – one is inclined to agree with Jaurès. But we should note that the Reich’s institutions as established by Bismarck in the years 1867–71 represented an almost insurmountable barrier to the kinds of revolution envisaged by Luxemburg *or* Bebel.³⁵

33 An interesting revisionist viewpoint, emphasizing the SPD’s revolutionary potential, is found in Jens-Uwe Guettel, “Reform, Revolution, and the ‘Original Catastrophe’: Political Change in Prussia and Germany on the Eve of the First World War,” *Journal of Modern History* 91 (2019): 311–40.

34 *Internationaler Sozialisten-Kongreß zu Amsterdam. 14. bis 20. August 1904* (Berlin, 1904), 34–44; the speakers’ duel between Jaurès and Bebel is described in Kevin J. Callahan, *Demonstration Culture* (Leicester, 2010), 20–31.

35 For contrasting attempts to assess elements of stasis and change in Germany’s political system, see James Retallack, “Ideas into Politics: Meanings of ‘Stasis’ in Wilhelmine

Marx and Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, had proclaimed, “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains.”³⁶ This slogan still provided a rallying cry for millions of German workers on the eve of the First World War. But it was no longer convincing for millions of other workers: they had plenty to lose, or thought they had. Political equality and social inclusion lay out of reach. Yet, along the way they had accomplished remarkable feats of organization and exhibited moral courage in dark times. They had created a national party from almost nothing in the 1860s, and it had grown to become the envy of social democrats around the globe. For the cause, if not the achievement, of democratic reform and social equality, German Social Democrats had changed the world in which they lived – as we can see through British eyes over the four and a half decades chronicled in this volume.

Germany,” in *Wilhelminism and Its Legacies*, ed. Geoff Eley and Retallack (Oxford, 2003), 235–52; Oliver F.R. Haardt, *Bismarcks ewiger Bund* (Darmstadt, 2020).

36 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, 43 vols. (Berlin-GDR, 1977), 4:493.

PART I

1870–1877

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Joseph Hume Burnley¹ to Earl of Clarendon,² No. 17, Dresden
(May 6, 1870)

Britain's chargé d'affaires, J. Hume Burnley, is stationed in Dresden – the capital of the Kingdom of Saxony. Here he sends a report “on the general question of Land Tenure in Saxony” to the British Foreign Office in London. Saxony, he writes, is “eminently an industrial country and becomes so more and more every day.” One part of the report describes the situation of small farmers, agricultural labourers, home workers, craftsmen, and wage earners.

Machinery [in agriculture] ... is not much employed as a substitute for hand labour. For the individual it would be too costly and the small proprietors are not much inclined to club together for the purpose. Those mostly in use are chaff and turnip cutters with threshing and sowing machines.

The smaller proprietors work their own lands with the help of their families and at best a few extra hands at harvest time....

Wages vary a good deal according to the distance of the district from towns and according to the industrial and agricultural character of the neighbourhood.

A good deal also depends as to whether the estate is large enough to afford fixed employment for their hands or only temporary occupation.

I. Labourers wages annually in cash

Bailiff [overseer] from 50 to 100 Thalers³
Man for the Horses from 35 to 75 Thalers
Boy for the Horses, 20 ... 35
Man for the Cattle, 24 ... 40
Boy for the Cattle, 12 ... 22
Dairy maid, 15 ... 40

1 Joseph Hume Burnley (1821–1904) was a career British diplomat who served as chargé d'affaires to the Kingdom of Saxony (at Dresden) from December 9, 1867, until his retirement on October 18, 1873. Early in his career Burnley served as attaché in Madrid, Frankfurt, Lisbon, and St. Petersburg. He became secretary of legation at Berne (1858), then acting chargé d'affaires at Copenhagen (1864), Washington, DC (1864), and The Hague (1867).

2 George Villiers, 4th Earl of Clarendon (1800–70), British foreign secretary 1853–8, 1865–6, 1868–70.

3 The mark was introduced after German unification in 1871, with the exchange rate of one thaler = three marks.

In many districts besides their wages they receive presents at Fairtime or Christmas in the shape of linen or flax seed which may add about 5 or 12 Thalers annually to their respective wages.

The cost of Board and Lodging is put down at
 from 70 to 110 Thalers for a man
 from 60 to 100 Thalers for a woman (the Thaler = 3 Shillings)

II. Daily Labourers

The usual daily wage for a full working day from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. is for men from 10 to 12 ½ Groschen (10 Groschen = 1 Shilling). A good deal however depends on the competition of neighbouring manufactories and the greater or lesser demand at harvest time in which case it may rise to 18–30 Groschen whilst on the other hand in Districts where the labourer is sure of finding employment even in wintertime it may fall to 7 ½ or 8 Groschens.

For women the usual rate is from 5 to 7 ½ Groschens according to demand + supply.

For short working days the wages would be
 for men from 6 ½ to 9 Groschens
 for women from 4 to 5 Groschens.

Both men + women have generally ½ an hour in the forenoon, one hour at midday and ½ an hour in the afternoon for rest + food. The women make it a condition very often that they shall have 2 full hours to look after their household affairs. Such labourers are not as a general rule boarded, when this is the case the men receive 10–12 down to 3 Groschen according as labour may be cheap or dear and the women from 8 to 2 Groschen.

The Saxon labourer does not emigrate much if we may judge by the statistics of the triennial period 1859/61.... At the same time there is no doubt there has been a diminution of the agricultural labour of the country to the extent perhaps of 18% during the period 1849/61 not so much with regard to the fixed hands as the fluctuating daily labour.

This diminution however is not owing to emigration but rather to a change in the current of labour to industrial channels where the wages are higher and work more certain and with which agriculture cannot compete.⁴

⁴ For maps and statistics documenting Saxony's geographic regions, population density, industrial centres, administrative districts, urban populations, and the occupational profile of its workforce, see materials listed under chapter 1 in the Open Access (CC 4.0)

Proprietors generally live on their own properties. The standard of living and general circumstances of the smaller proprietors are extremely varied, according to the extent of their incomes, the climate and condition of their holdings.

On the whole their circumstances are not positively bad. But owing to the high price of land and the high interest they may have to pay they must show great energy and practice a rigid economy in order to be able to save. Their general habits of living are very simple. If we compare this class with a like class in other countries it would appear as if the Saxon landowner cared more for house and clothing than for actual food and it is not to be disputed that there is considerable room for improvement. This however is a drawback which affects equally the whole industrial population of the mountainous districts. The consumption of meat is very small, in the most favourable years upon a general average of the population not more than 50 lbs and in less favourable years 20 lbs per head and per year. If we consider that for the well to do classes 125 lbs per head is the normal ratio, it will be seen what a small amount of animal food remains for the consumption of the poorer classes.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/151.

Joseph Archer Crowe⁵ to Earl Granville,⁶ No. 1, Leipzig (July 6, 1870)

Consul-General J.A. Crowe wrote this report two months before the scheduled elections to the Reichstag of the North German Confederation; but when war with France broke out in mid-July 1870, the election was postponed, eventually taking place on March 3, 1871. Crowe assesses the electoral prospects of the main political parties in Saxony

Online Supplement to James Retallack, *Red Saxony: Election Battles and the Spectre of Democracy in Germany, 1860–1918* (Oxford, 2017), <https://redsaxony.utoronto.ca>.

- 5 Joseph Archer Crowe (1825–96) was a British diplomat, journalist, and expert art historian. He served as Britain's consul-general at Leipzig 1860–72 and thereafter in Düsseldorf, Berlin, and Paris. He was the father of Eyre Crowe, the leading expert on Germany in Britain's Foreign Office before 1914 (and foreign secretary in the 1920s). J.A. Crowe's reports from Germany often demonstrated marked sympathy for the National Liberal Party. See Crowe, *Reminiscences*, which ends in 1860: unfortunately, Crowe never published a planned second volume, allegedly for reasons of discretion.
- 6 Granville Leveson-Gower (1815–91), 2nd Earl Granville, was a British MP and statesman. He served as British foreign secretary 1851–2, 1870–4, 1880–5 (on the latter two occasions in Prime Minister William Gladstone's first and second Cabinets).

and offers the typical comment that election campaigns in Germany are torpid compared to those in Britain.

The first North German parliament is about to be succeeded by the second which awaits election in September. A languid agitation seems to characterize, especially in Saxony, the movements of party; and, whether it be that the season is unfavourable to combination, that politicians have not much confidence in their power to give an impulse one way or other to questions of moment, or that material prosperity and the pursuit of commercial advantages prove, most attractive to the master, there is an amount of apathy to be noticed which contrasts singularly with the importance of the points involved in the choice of new representatives to the Bund [North German Confederation].

As far as I can judge, the state of the public opinion in this kingdom is very equally divided; – on one side being the liberals and ultra liberals who desire the maintainance [*sic*] and extension of the present federal state, on the other the conservatives who would get rid of it if they could, but, wanting power to attain that object, merely try to check the further growth or impede the natural progress, of the Bund. There are shades of opinion in both camps. The National liberals are in favour of a responsible federal ministry, diminished taxation, economy in the military budget and an extension of the Bund to South Germany, whilst the more advanced progressists go further and, apart from all considerations of policy or public safety, require not only that for which their moderate colleagues strive but a declaration of rights, an unified Bund, shorter military service, reduction of the army, and consequent decrease of taxation. The high conservatives, hating Prussia, but clinging to all institutions that hedge round the majesty of the Crown, care neither for lower taxation nor smaller contingents, nor shorter service. The middle conservatives and patriot Saxons, who accept the Bund as it is, shudder at the prospect of exchanging the federal parliament checked by the federal council for a federal parliament with a federal ministry. They declare against all attempts at what they call the centralizing of power. They insist on preserving Saxony's right to dispose of herself and keep her independence, asserting with curious logic when we think of the amount of sovereignty she has lost, that the sole condition of life for Saxony as a member of the Bund is that all those rights should be preserved to her which are necessary to the existence of an independent state. They have no such objection to army reductions as the high conservatives; but they say on the contrary that the expenses of soldiering must be cut down as low as the constitution allows of doing and so far as the safety of the state permits. In the two last sentences lie the very essence of the matter in hand.

All parties have had to ask themselves what the constitution allows; and in doing so they have had to look to the following clauses of the charter. Clause 60 declares that the peace contingent of the federal army shall be regulated till the 31st of December 1871 and, fixed at the rate of one per cent of the population of 1867, the peace contingent after that date being determined by federal legislation; but clause 62 contains a paragraph to the effect that the yearly sum of 225 Thaler per man for the peace contingent shall be paid not only up to the 31st of December 1871 but so long afterwards as the peace contingent has not been altered by a federal law. So that the contingent cannot be reduced nor the charge per head for each soldier be changed until parliament has passed a measure to that effect, a measure which it may be urged, involves an alteration of the constitution and requires a majority of two thirds to make it valid.

It is very doubtful whether the Saxon conservatives will be able to carry that portion of their scheme even though chance should throw them, as no doubt it will, into the same lobby as the ultra liberals and progressists of all Germany.

Finally when the conservatives speak of reductions as being subject to considerations affecting the safety of the State, it is very obvious that the terms they use are of dubious meaning because the State to which they publicly allude is the North German Bund whilst that which they have in their thoughts is Saxony proper.

Insofar as the votes of Saxony in the second Reichsrath [Reichstag] are concerned, we may calculate that a respectable number will be conservative, whilst a number equally respectable but perhaps less imposing will join the great body of the National liberals. The latter will probably insist on a reduction of the contingent especially in cavalry, but I have every reason to believe that they will not seriously ask for a diminution of the charge of 225 Thaler because they think that that sum will be swallowed up even under a system of greater economy. To some extent therefore they will give support to Count Bismarck. The conservatives and progressists will agree at least in the military question; but in this combination I can see no prospect of a serious difficulty for the Chancellor of the Bund.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/152.

J. Hume Burnley to Earl Granville, No. 10, Dresden (January 31, 1871)

Burnley reports that the Saxon public is largely apathetic toward the events that transpired in the Versailles Palace on January 18, 1871, when Wilhelm I, king of Prussia, was proclaimed German emperor

(Kaiser).⁷ Burnley also notes little excitement about the capitulation of Paris on January 28 or the arrest of August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht.

If addresses from Towns and Councils are any proof of the loyalty of a nation, nothing can be more loyal than the attitude of the Saxons towards the King of Prussia on his assuming the Imperial Title.

If I am asked, however, whether the masses themselves and society in general evince much interest, I am constrained to say that I fail to perceive it.⁸ The same may be said with regard to the very important event of the capitulation of Paris. Beyond a display of flags from the Public Buildings and Church Towers, there was very little genuine enthusiasm; certainly not to be compared to the manifestation on the fall of Sedan.

The fact is that enthusiasm was beginning to cool down and that, although there was a certain exultation at the German successes, the feeling predominated that enough had been done and that peace would be very grateful to the soldiers and their families; at the same time the fear that peace might not ensue even after the capitulation of Paris, tended no doubt to check the outburst one would naturally have expected to see.

Social Democracy, although existing here as every-where, is too firmly kept under by the Government for it ever to become dangerous as long as Police and Military combine to be what they are, very uncompromising when repressive measures have to be carried out. The start attempted by the Brunswick Democrats⁹ found a certain echo in Saxony and a meeting on the subject was proposed at Zwickau but an immediate stop was put to it by the Government and nothing more was heard of the meeting or the Democrats.

The arrest of the two Saxon Deputies to the Berlin Diet, Messrs [August] Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht[,], social Democrats in politics, a short time ago at Leipzig for treasonable proceedings,¹⁰ is a stern proof that a German Government knows how to put down what may become a disturbing element unless firmly taken in hand and as the German workman enjoys a greater amount of well being & many more opportunities of rationally passing his time at places of amusement to which both rich and poor may resort in the greatest good fellowship and harmony, I do not think the labouring classes have much to complain of.

7 Comments attached to this report indicate that it was to be sent to Prime Minister William Gladstone and Queen Victoria.

8 See the report of J.A. Crowe writing from Leipzig, November 15, 1871, below, which also notes a lack of patriotic enthusiasm among the working classes.

9 Burnley is referring to the manifesto of September 5, 1870, issued by the Braunschweig executive committee of the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP). The manifesto called for an honourable peace with France and the democratization of the German political system, and opposed the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.

10 They were arrested on December 17, 1870, for their criticism of the war and their plea for peace without annexations.

The impetus given to socialistic tendencies comes more from abroad through international societies having at their head disappointed Demagogues who try to wreak their vengeance in this way upon a Government by whom they consider themselves neglected.

If the workman were left to the natural bias of his own character, he would be a much more peaceable man and less liable to be influenced by the oratory of those leaders who hold out eutopian [*sic*] prospects which can never be realized as long as the rich and the poor exist as a distinct class.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/153.*¹¹



Map 2. Reichstag constituencies in the Kingdom of Saxony, 1867–1918.

Source: Adapted by the author from Philologisch-historische Klasse der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, ed., *Reichstagswahlen im Königreich Sachsen 1871–1912. Karte D IV 2, Atlas zur Geschichte und Landeskunde von Sachsen* (Leipzig, 1997). © James Retallack.

¹¹ Here, as elsewhere, an asterisk after the archival citation indicates that this report is also found in *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2016, 2019).

J. Hume Burnley to Earl Granville, No. 27, Dresden (April 13, 1871)

Burnley reports on the result of the first general election to the Reichstag (imperial diet), held on March 3, 1871. In newly unified Germany, this was the first general election in which all males over the age of twenty-five were entitled to vote (although overall turnout was only 51 per cent). See [table 5](#), below, comparing the Reichstag election results of March 1871 and January 1874, after the British envoy's report of January 17, 1874.

For Electoral purposes, Saxony is divided into 23 districts, each District returning a member to the federal Parliament [Reichstag].¹²

The Fortschritt [Progressive] Party of Advanced Liberals appear to be the strongest in point of numbers, next in progression come the Conservatives, then the National Liberals and lastly the Social Democrats, who polled altogether 41,203 votes.¹³ It must however be borne in mind that, when the Social Democrats failed to secure their own candidates, they in most cases coalesced with the Fortschritt Party as the one most nearly allied to them in principles, so that the Elections generally, as far as Saxony is concerned were highly Democratic.

This is rather more apparent when we consider the political bearing of those chosen.¹⁴

None of the candidates belonging to the upper classes of Society were elected, all those, who came forward being beaten by more humble competitors....

I do not think that the present crisis in Paris¹⁵ with which the Social Democrats here sympathize, will tend much to advance their peculiar ideas with the more sober-minded portion of the community, nevertheless we cannot overlook the fact that such tendencies are on the increase foreboding an internecine struggle at a future day between those who possess and those who do not possess.

12 See [map 2](#) for all twenty-three Reichstag electoral districts in Saxony (1867–1918). A contemporary map (ca. 1912) showing the same districts is found at [map S.2.5](#) in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*.

13 The official total was 42,077, or 19.7 per cent of all ballots cast; see [table 5](#).

14 For the winning party in each of Saxony's twenty-three Reichstag districts in March 1871, see [map S.3.1](#) in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*. No fewer than twelve electoral districts were won with over 60 per cent of the popular vote by either left-liberal Progressives or National Liberals; see [map S.3.2](#) in the same volume. Such districts can be referred to as "party bastions."

15 Burnley refers to the Paris Commune (March 18 to May 28, 1871).

It is quite sufficient to read the expressions made use of by Advocate [lawyer] [Reinhold] Schraps,¹⁶ the Socialist Member for Zwickau, in order to see how their feelings run. Schraps said in the Berlin Assembly [Reichstag]:

“The hope expressed at the Address debate that the German Empire was established on a solid basis, is not shared by all and certainly not by me. I do not think that the German Empire like its’ [sic] predecessor, will last a thousand years. On the contrary, I believe that before twenty years have elapsed, the position of affairs will be a very different one and more in accordance with what is now passing in the West.” His party therefore openly avow that their hopes are centred in the reign of the Communists in Paris.

If tables like those I have now the honor of sending to Your Lordship, could be procured for all the rest of Germany, I think that an adequate idea might be formed of the relative strength of Political Parties and their ultimate chances of success and if renewed at each Election, would prove a useful statistical record.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/153.

J. Hume Burnley to Earl Granville, No. 36, Dresden (June 9, 1871)

In the “founders’ years” of 1871–3, the organization of a German labour movement continued a trend from the mid-1860s, namely the gradual emergence of cooperative organizations resembling modern-day unions. Such organizations counted far more craftsmen than factory workers among their members. August Bebel’s Social Democratic Workers’ Party competed with the followers of Ferdinand Lassalle in the General German Workers’ Association (Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein, or ADAV) to affiliate members of these organizations with their own wing of Social Democracy. These developments were accelerated by a wave of strikes in 1871–3 and the repression of strikers by employers, police, and other state authorities.¹⁷ Burnley notes, however, that “there is a good deal of practical common sense in what they [the weavers] advocate.”

16 Schraps ran for election as a Social Democrat but joined the Progressive caucus once the Reichstag opened, leaving Bebel as the sole representative of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Germany (SDAP) in 1871.

17 See Lothar Machtan, *Streiks und Aussperrungen im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (Berlin, 1984); Joachim Wagner and Manfred Mendes, *Politischer Terrorismus und Strafrecht im Deutschen Kaiserreich von 1871* (Heidelberg, 1981).

A first effort at combined action among the working population of Saxony took place a short time ago at Glauchau on the occasion of the assembling of the "First German Weaver's Congress."

[August] Bebel the well known Social Democrat and Member of Glauchau¹⁸ to the Imperial Diet was present and made it is said a long speech, not however reported by the Glauchau Papers. 77 Towns and Districts were represented by 157 Delegates. The resolutions offered and accepted shew clearly the object and tendencies of the meeting.

The first resolution which was carried by a majority of 131 to 2 was to the following effect.

"The First German Weaver's Congress recognizes the necessity of a union of all workmen among themselves and with their colleagues of other countries on an international basis, and declares it to be the duty of the Heads of existing organizations to pave the way towards their fusion into one, and to start at once by establishing mutual friendly and brotherly relations with the object of affording information, warning and help."

On the question of wages it was decided that the local unions should at once prepare tariffs of existing wages and hand them in to the Central Committee.

It was further unanimously decided that the Assembly should choose for the space of one year a "Vorort"¹⁹ as well as a commission to consist of 5 Members who shall keep up a communication between the separate branches and foreign Countries.

A monthly circular is to be issued at the price of one Groschen and a workmen's Congress to be held annually.

The costs of the Administration to be divided among the Unions per capita.

A series of recommendations were then put forward which embody more clearly their views and wishes and which shortly expressed were as follows:

1.) "The Congress of Weavers recommends to all members of the trade henceforward to demand payment for those kinds of work which have hitherto been done without payment being asked for them; the amount of wages to be demanded for these kinds of work ought to be fixed by local committees to be elected in all manufacturing districts, and the result of these measures should be made known through the Circular of the Chief Committee."

2.) "The Congress recommends to all members of the trade to use the utmost precaution in the matter of strikes (the English expression

18 The seventeenth Saxon electoral district for Glauchau-Meerane.

19 See explanation provided below by Burnley.

is now universally used abroad) and never to organize any, unless there is a certainty that the means at their disposal and the support to be expected will be sufficient to insure [*sic*] success.²⁰ In the case of a strike having broken out, the general Congress of Weavers advocates the formation of Boards of Arbitration to be composed of an equal number of masters and working men, for the amicable settlement of the points in dispute.”

3.) “The Congress of Weavers declares that it is an imperative duty to support both morally and materially such working men who have been exposed to measures of coercion or persecution (*gemäßregelt*) on the part of their masters or the Public Authorities in consequence of the line of action taken by them for the benefit of their fellow workmen.”

4.) “It would be an act of humanity and justice on the part of the Governments strictly to forbid the working of children in factories and workshops. The Congress of weavers considers it as one of its tasks to make the greatest exertions for bringing about a change of legislation in this sense.”

5.) “It is a duty of all members of the trade to take the requisite steps that the women who are engaged in factories or workshops should be admitted into the trade-unions on a footing of parity with the men, in order to bring about an equalization of the wages for women and men.”

6.) “The Congress of Weavers declares: whereas the introduction of a normal working day of 10 Hours duration with an increase of wages would be a step towards the solution of the social problems, it is the duty of all members of the trade to use every legal means in their power to promote the passing of a law which would embody the above principle.”

7.) “The distribution of work through foremen and the imposition of fines are a source of the greatest inconvenience for the working-men and ought, therefore, to be abolished. The operatives should combine for the purpose of doing away with this nuisance once for all.”

8.) “As the course of legal procedure is very troublesome and leaves many cases undecided it is a matter of urgent necessity that industrial boards of arbitration should be formed, whose decisions ought to be binding both on the plaintiff and the defendant. Those members of the Board who would be taken from the trade ought to be elected by universal and direct suffrage.”

9.) “The Congress of Weavers will endeavour as much as possible to bring about the foundation of industrial schools in which obligatory and

20 Members of the Congress, the ADAV, and the SDAP were all aware that failed strikes – leading to dismissals of employees, recriminations against them, depletion of strike funds, and low morale – could set back the Social Democratic cause.

gratuitous instruction would be given under the direction and superintendence of members of the trade. Wherever it is practicable, the Congress of Weavers will immediately take the matter into its own hands.”

10.) “Whenever a change of the Customs laws is contemplated, not only the great manufacturers and their interests should be consulted, but also these of the operatives [i.e., workers]. An enquiry should always be made as to what influence the proposed change of legislation would exercise upon the rate of wages of the operatives engaged in the trade in question.”

Mr. Bebel[']s particular sentiments in connection with the communistic doctrines of Paris are too well known to Your Lordship from Berlin for one to discant upon them here, and he is certainly not likely to do the workmen of Saxony much good unless he and his Colleague [Reinhold] Schrapf member for Zwickau²¹ can give them more wholesome advice than what fell from their lips in the Berlin Diet.²² At the same time Your Lordship will not fail to perceive that they have commenced their proceedings with a good deal of method and an evident desire to avoid a conflict with the Authorities.

Setting aside the naive form of expression in recommendation 7 it cannot be denied that there is a good deal of practical common sense in what they advocate and if manufacturers and masters take it up in a conciliatory way it may lead to some important changes or if resisted may be the commencement of a general social conflict extending to all parts of the manufacturing world.

Your Lordship will be able to judge by my Despatch No. 27 of the 13th April of the relative strength of the Social Democratic Party in Saxony.

The towns of Glauchau and Meerane have been selected as ‘Vororts’ (seats of the permanent committee for the ensuing year) and for the next Congress the city of Berlin has been chosen.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/153.

²¹ Saxony’s eighteenth electoral district.

²² On May 25, 1871, Bebel delivered one of his most famous speeches in the Reichstag. At a time when French government troops were slaughtering defenders of the Commune in Paris, and in the face of derisive laughter from his fellow Reichstag deputies, Bebel declared, “Gentlemen, even though at this moment Paris is being suppressed, then remember that the struggle in Paris is only a preliminary skirmish, that the main issue in Europe still lies before us, and that before too many decades have passed the battle-cry of the Parisian proletariat – ‘War on the palaces, Peace in the cottages, Death to misery and idleness!’ – will become the battle cry of the entire European proletariat. (Amusement.)” *BARS*, 1:150.

J. Hume Burnley to Earl Granville, No. 43, Dresden (July 1, 1871)

In this dispatch Burnley is mainly seeing phantoms. In London, Karl Marx was both unable and unwilling to deliver significant financial support to the followers of Bebel and Liebknecht. And most of the incriminating evidence used against both men in the Leipzig trial of March 1872 had been scooped up in a raid on the party's executive committee in Braunschweig in September 1870. Expecting imminent arrest, Bebel had ensured he had a "clean desk" before the police arrived at his lodgings on the morning of December 17, 1871.²³

On receipt of Your Lordship's confidential Despatch No. 18 of the 20th Ultimo I enquired of the Head of Police²⁴ whether anything was known of the doings of the International Society²⁵ in Saxony.

...

Whatever organization they may possess, and at present but little is known ..., would emanate along with the funds at their disposal from the Central Committee in London, Paris and Berlin.

...

I have no doubt that the meetings of the German workmen ... all tend towards the same end, but as a society to be effectual must be organized by the same general rules, we must look for them where the chiefs of the Society come together and where the motive Power exists and such appears to be London.

When [August] Bebel was accused of high treason by the Berlin Courts²⁶ there were found among his Papers very strict disciplinary regulations emanating from the London Committee with distinct directions not to move without orders from London, from whence also the money was to come.

Should I hear anything further I will report to Your Lordship at once.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/153.*

23 August Bebel, *Aus meinem Leben* (Berlin, 1961), 405 (hereafter cited as *BAmL*).

24 Dresden's Polizei-Präsident at this time was Karl August Schwauß.

25 International Workingmen's Association (known as the First International), founded in London on September 28, 1864; Karl Marx was its secretary for Germany. See Roger Morgan, *The German Social Democrats and the First International, 1864–1872* (Cambridge, 1965).

26 Bebel was arrested on December 17, 1870, and held in "investigative custody" (*Untersuchungshaft*) in a Leipzig jail until April 28, 1871. A show trial on the charge of conspiracy to commit treason was held in Leipzig (not Berlin) from March 11 to 26, 1872, when Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht were sentenced to two years of imprisonment (see below). Bebel and Liebknecht were held under the relatively lenient terms of "fortress custody" (*Festungshaft*), sometimes offered to political prisoners in that era.

**J. Hume Burnley to Earl Granville, No. 56, Dresden
(November 1, 1871)**

Burnley documents the growing wave of strikes in the second half of 1871, at precisely the time when Bismarck was mobilizing Prussian authorities – and urging Austro-Hungarians to follow suit – to crack down on labour actions and the parties that supported them. But Burnley sounds a conciliatory note that can also be found in high circles, which recognized the need to address legitimate demands of the working classes. This was the “carrot” that went with the stick of repression, and although it disappeared from view during the 1870s, it reappeared in the form of Bismarck’s social legislation of the 1880s.

The workwomen of Dresden attempted a short time ago to found a Social Democratic Club at the head of which and as its recognized leader was a young woman of about 20 years of age.

The Police have now dissolved it on the strength of the law of 1850 on Meetings and Associations ... which forbids minors from taking part in such proceedings or being the promoters of them, and as the young person in question had not attained her 24th year, that of majority for women in Saxony, the meeting was broken up.

I am sorry to say that strikes are beginning to crop up here and there in Saxony.

The coopers in one of the large Breweries struck a short time ago, and now news comes from Chemnitz that upward of 6000 factory hands have turned out – demanding 10 hours labour and a rise of 25% in their wages.

It remains to be seen how the manufacturers will act should the strikers persist in their demands.

The Authorities however may be counted on for keeping proper order, and if the law can reach them, it will be enforced at once as in the case at Glauchau....

The only difficulty, it appears to me, arises from the fact that, with the altered circumstances of the times, an alteration in laws made at a distant period may be required, as it would be highly desirable that the lower orders should have some means open to them of stating their grievances in a sober spirit rather than resort to the strike system as a sort of threat to their employers.

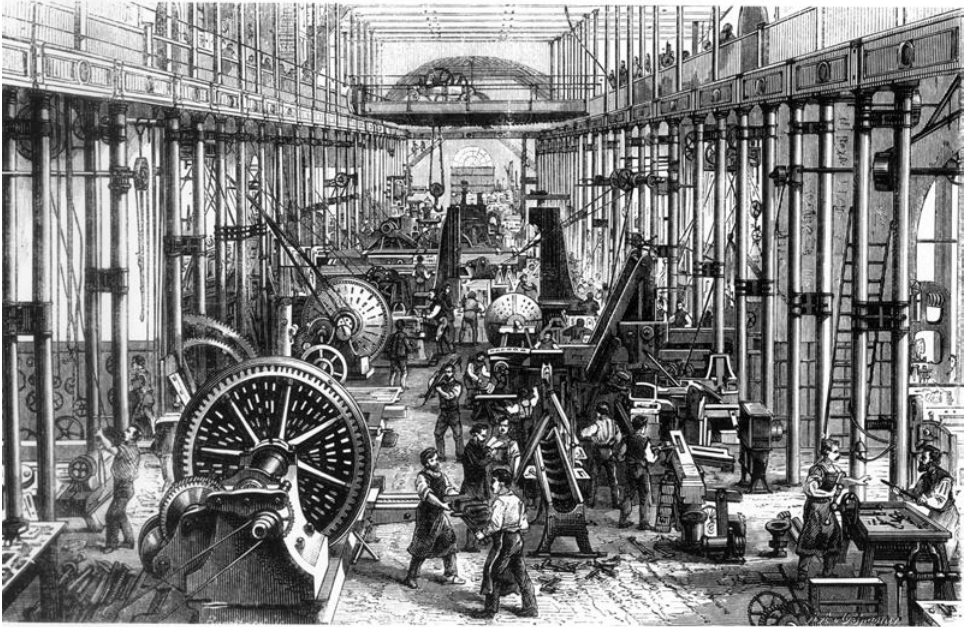


Figure 6. Richard Hartmann's machine works factory in Chemnitz, 1868/9.

Richard Hartmann (1809–78) was one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the Kingdom of Saxony. Known as the “Chemnitz railroad king,” he produced his first locomotive in 1848 and his thousandth in 1878. The people of Chemnitz turned out regularly to watch a team of horses pull the newest locomotive from Hartmann's factory to the city's main railway station.

Source: Author's collection.

J. Hume Burnley to Earl Granville, No. 57, Dresden (November 6, 1871)

A major strike in Chemnitz began on October 28, 1871. It was part of the escalating labour action undertaken in these years and the first major industrial action since the founding of the Reich in January 1871. Burnley's sympathy obviously lies with employers trying to meet the challenge of such action, not with the workers who often saw no alternative to laying down their tools. Strikers' demands almost invariably included a ten-hour workday when the norm was still twelve hours or more. Burnley also illustrates a common view held by British and German liberals,

namely, that the true interests of workers – and social harmony – were threatened by irresponsible and doctrinaire leaders from “outside.” Instead, he concludes, workers should be “taught to listen to the advice of others better qualified by position and education to teach them.”

Since my Despatch No. 56 of the 1st Instant was written, there has been no new phase in the Chemnitz strike. The operatives have up to the present behaved in an orderly way and in some cases responded to the call of the owners to resume work under a strict guarantee that they will not allow them to be molested by the dissentients. In one factory about 3/5^o of the Hands have returned and in one or two others the Half. At the same time as I had the honor to state in my abovementioned Despatch the law will be vigorously applied should it be found necessary to quell any thing like disturbance or intimidation, and a first step has been taken in the direction by the Town Council of Chemnitz warning the workman that according to § 153 of the “Gewerbeordnung”²⁷ or Trade Law such illegal acts will be subjected to a punishment of 3 months imprisonment, if not to a higher penalty in conformity with the criminal code of Germany.

I beg to inclose [*sic*] a statement emanating from the principal Chemnitz manufacturers with a view to setting before the Public what they had proposed of their own accord to do when the strike took them by surprise.²⁸

The general belief here is that foreign elements are at work to seduce the workman from his good intentions and that supplies are sent by the Central Committee in London²⁹ where local funds are not forthcoming.

The principal organ of the Social Democratic Party here is the [Dresdner] “Volksbote” edited by a certain Dr. Walster³⁰ and written in the usual rabid style of such prints where as much odium as possible is thrown upon the manufacturer, who is generally held up as a tyrant from whom no good can be expected.

27 The Law on Freedom of Occupation and Freedom of Coalition, dated June 21, 1869, passed in the Reichstag of the North German Confederation; it was then adopted for Imperial Germany in 1871 as the Imperial Industrial Code (*Reichsgewerbeordnung*). Its provisions had already been implemented in part a year earlier. The law standardized and simplified accepted practices for everyone who carried on a business. The Law on Freedom of Coalition recognized (§152) trade unions as legitimate representatives of workers’ interests, but the next paragraph in effect circumscribed that provision. As soon as strikes began to multiply, §153 was used by employers and police (in combination) to harass picketers and to protect strike-breakers (“scabs”).

28 Burnley enclosed a translation of a manifesto issued by Chemnitz manufacturers.

29 The Central Council of the International Workingmen’s Association (First International).

30 August Otto-Walster.

Such prints do an immense amount of harm and tend to accustom the workmen to [a] chain of ideas which are in the main unjust.

The manufacturer cannot go beyond a certain point where his work becomes unprofitable to him, but this the workman continually poisoned by doctrines subversive of all order either cannot or will not understand.

In this way a vast social revolution is gradually gaining ground which must end in lamentable conflicts, unless the lower orders are emancipated from the leading strings of their present rulers and taught to listen to the advice of others better qualified by position and education to teach them.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/153.*

Joseph Archer Crowe to Earl Granville, No. 4, Leipzig (November 15, 1871)

Reasons for worker unrest in 1870–3 and its exploitation by the Social Democrats included rising prices for food and housing, stock-market speculation and bankruptcies, and the general feeling among workers that, unless they mobilized for political action, they would never be permitted to share in the economic and social benefits that flowed from the French war reparations paid to Germany in 1871. Joseph Archer Crowe, Britain's consul-general in Leipzig, identifies such "anxious contemplation," despite the "unhealthy" chimera of prosperity resulting from the French payments: "Money is so abundant that people seem not to know what to do with it," writes Crowe.

Looking superficially at the state of affairs one might be tempted to believe that everything is running smoothly in the machinery of government; – that trade, commerce, and finance are prospering; and that the people have but to enjoy the good things which providence and their courage have stored for them; yet there is much to a thinker and particularly to me who can look behind the scenes to suggest anxious contemplation.

Prince Bismarck is looked up to by a great majority of the people as an idol: no one it is thought is more cunning to detect or to mar a dangerous plot; no one more energetic in meeting a threatening emergency. This feeling is so widely spread that it extends to the ranks of the national and liberal party and bids it condone the wrongs which of old it so violently strove to redress. The liberals of Prussia silently allow that Count

Eulenburg³¹ should remain at the head of home affairs and govern with all the rigour natural to a member of the Junker party....

There is still in the South German population, even in its remoter districts a feeling of pride and pleasure at the grand successes achieved by the German arms. Every soldier who came home from the campaign brought with him the sentiments of a German as contradistinguished from those of a more confined nationalism – But there is no counting on the long duration of such a sentiment....

There never was a time when public prosperity was apparently greater than it is at present in Germany. Manufactures are active, and production is only checked by the difficulty of obtaining raw material and coals. Money is so abundant that people seem not to know what to do with it. This however is but the silver lining to a cloud. There is much to suggest the impression of unsoundness in the way in which financial speculations are being carried on. Within less than six weeks past, scores of companies have been formed for banking and other purposes throughout Germany, the scrip³² of which has been issued at high premiums. The redundancy of money – attributable to the chance winning of milliards [billions] from France is not like a redundancy of money earned by trade and manufacture. It is a plethora of an essentially unhealthy kind which is not unlikely at no very remote period to lead to a crisis of a disastrous character.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/154.

J. Hume Burnley to Earl Granville, No. 59, Dresden (November 20, 1871)

The failure of the Chemnitz strikers to achieve their objectives was typical of most strikes in the early 1870s.

With reference to my Despatches No 56 and 57 of the 1st and 6th Instants I have the honor to state, on the authority of the Minister of the Interior,³³ that the Chemnitz strike is considered to be at end. Of the 6000 men who struck work all have returned with a few exceptions to the various factories where they were employed on the term of their employers.

31 Count Friedrich Albert zu Eulenburg (1815–81), Prussian minister of the interior (1862–78). Along with Bismarck and Berlin's police presidents, Eulenburg played a major role in escalating the repression of Social Democracy between 1870 and leaving office in March 1878.

32 A provisional certificate of money subscribed to a bank or company, entitling the holder to a formal certificate and dividends.

33 On Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz (1826–1906), Saxon minister of the interior from 1866 to 1891, see the biographical note to George Strachey's report of July 7, 1878.

Notwithstanding therefore the delusive promises held out by the Social Democratic Papers of help from abroad, the Saxon workman has had the good sense to consult his own interest in accepting the employment at hand rather than wait for support against impending starvation.

The whole question however can hardly be considered as settled by this isolated failure. The hopes of the Social Democratic Party are naturally centered on England and everything that tends to encourage them is eagerly commented on....

It can never be too widely known that the moral influence of England is very great abroad and may be the means of doing great good or immense evil.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/153.*



Figure 7. Leipzig high treason trial, 1872. Standing at centre is Wilhelm Liebknecht. Sitting at extreme right is August Bebel, speaking with the third defendant, Adolf Hepner, an assistant on the staff of the Social Democratic newspaper *Der Volksstaat* (The People's State). Woodcut by Friedrich Waibler.

Source: *Illustrierte Zeitung* (Leipzig), Bd. 58, Nr. 1501 (April 6, 1872), 245 / Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München.

Joseph Archer Crowe to Earl Granville, No. 4, Leipzig (March 28, 1872)

Crowe reports that the trial of August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht has concluded. Without much comment, Crowe seems to support the guilty verdict reached unanimously by the jury.³⁴ But he adds an interesting wrinkle.

[Members of the jury] were all and severally threatened by anonymous letters with punishment in the event of a verdict against Liebknecht and Bebel....

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/156.

George Strachey³⁵ to Earl Granville, No. 2, Dresden (January 17, 1874)

The new British envoy to Saxony, George Strachey, reports on the second general election to the Reichstag, which was held on January 10, 1874 (see [table 5](#), below, to compare the 1871 and 1874 results). The election showed significant gains for Social Democrats in the Kingdom of Saxony, in the number of votes (92,000) cast for their candidates and as measured by the party's share of all votes cast (36 per cent). These results far outpaced the Social Democrats' share of the vote (about 7 per cent) in all of Germany.

Twenty of the twenty four [*sic* for twenty-three] Saxon elections for the Parliament of the Reich have been concluded.³⁶ The result is:–

- the Fortschritt [Progressive] party has lost 4 seats:
- the National-Liberals and Conservative-Particularists have lost each 1 seat:
- the Social-Democrats muster in surprising force, sending to Berlin no less than 6 members, instead of their previous contingent of [August] Bebel, and the dubious [Reinhold] Schrap. Saxony, therefore,

34 In his report No. 12, Dresden (April 12, 1872), FO 68/155, J. Hume Burnley forwarded a translation of the Crown prosecutor's summary statement. Burnley's report No. 9 (April 1, 1872), noted that the state prosecutor told the jury that acquittal "would lend a sanction for ever to attempts at High Treason."

35 On George Strachey (1828–1912), British secretary of legation and chargé d'affaires (later minister resident) in Dresden from 1873 to 1897, see the introduction to this volume.

36 Note that in this report, Strachey is reporting only the result of the first (main) ballot, without knowing the results of the run-off ballots. Final tallies are found in [table 5](#).

seems to have elected twice the Social-Democrats as all the rest of the Reich:³⁷ Saxony and Prussia being the only German states where adherents of this party have been chosen.

The preponderance of Social Democracy here is both real and electoral. According to a usual estimate, about two thirds of the working population, industrial or agricultural, are Socialists.³⁸ Such strength becomes irresistible in districts where the villages, as well as the towns, are seats of manufacturing industry. However[,] the Social Democrats owe almost less to their absolute and distributive force, than to their electioneering energy and skill. A National-Liberal journal ascribes the unpalatable advance of Social-Democracy to ‘A Jesuit Intrigue’! but I gather that this hated faction has made proper use of the classical English methods of electioneering, while the Liberals have neglected the essential tactics, candidates and committees alike trusting more to their wishes than to their energies. Further, after a semblance of united action by the National-Liberal and the Fortschritt parties, each of these put forward a separate candidate for Dresden (Altstadt), the result being that Dr. [Johann] Jacoby, the Pure-Democrat, obtained a tie with Dr. [Eduard] Minckwitz (Fortschritt)³⁹ so that a casting [run-off] election between the last named has to take place. Dr. Jacoby, of course, is not quite a Social-Democrat, but the party support him, he is universally respected, and his return may possibly be secure.⁴⁰

It appears that the polls taken have been much larger than on other similar occasions.⁴¹ In several places besides those where they have succeeded, the Social-Democrats have shewn in strength. Bebel and [Wilhelm]

37 Strachey is correct: six Social Democrats were elected in Saxony, three in Prussia, and none in the rest of the empire.

38 Here Strachey grossly exaggerates the proportion of Saxon workers who would have considered themselves Social Democrats at this time. As his following statement suggests, he – like the Social Democrats themselves – tended to measure the number of adherents to the party according to its strength in Reichstag elections.

39 The prominent Progressive politician Heinrich *Eduard* Minckwitz (1819–86) was a member of the 1848 *Vorparlament* and, as a municipal councillor (*Stadtrat*) in Dresden, a strong supporter of the Dresden Uprising of May 1849. Although he did not take part in the fighting he was sentenced to two years in prison. He reacquired the right to practise as a lawyer in 1860. He sat in the Saxon *Landtag* from 1869 to 1881 and in the Reichstag in 1867 and 1871 to 1877.

40 On Johann Jacoby, see the note to the following report.

41 See [table 5](#). The SPD’s proportional increase in votes between 1871 and 1874 was higher in the Reich. Yet, in Saxony, more than one in three voters supported a Social Democratic candidate in 1874, setting off alarm bells in the camp of “state-supporting parties.”

Table 5. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1871 and 1874

	March 3, 1871			January 10, 1874		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
Saxony						
German Conservatives	19,769	9.2	0	18,704	7.2	1
Free Conservatives	6,858	3.2	0	36,545	14.1	5
National Liberals	53,208	25.0	8	69,782	26.9	7
Liberals, Left Liberals	57,037	26.8	13	35,985	13.9	4
Social Democrats	42,077	19.7	2	92,180	35.4	6
Total votes cast / seats	213,129		23	259,592		23
Voter turnout rate (%)	45.1			49.5		
Reich						
German Conservatives	549,000	14.1	57	359,959	7.0	22
Free Conservatives	346,000	8.9	37	375,523	7.2	33
National Liberals	1,171,000	30.1	125	1,542,501	29.7	155
Liberals, Left Liberals	642,000	16.5	82	524,000	10.0	53
Social Democrats	124,000	3.2	2	351,952	6.8	9
Total votes cast / seats	3,907,000		382	5,223,864		397
Voter turnout rate (%)	51.0			61.3		

Sources: Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden, Ministerium des Innern, Nrn. 865c, 865e; "Die Wahlen zum Deutschen Reichstag im Königreich Sachsen von 1871 bis 1907," *Zeitschrift des Königlich Sächsischen Statistischen Landesamts* (hereafter ZSSL) 54, Heft 2 (1908): 173; *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs* XIV, II. Teil (1875): 58–9, 130–1; Ritter, *Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch*, 38; Wolfgang Schröder, "Wahlrecht und Wahlen im Königreich Sachsen 1866–1896," in *Wahlen und Wahlkämpfe in Deutschland*, ed. Gerhard A. Ritter (Düsseldorf, 1997), 109, 115; and other sources.

Note: Votes won in 1871 in the Reich have been rounded. The Catholic Centre Party, ethnic minority parties, and other small groups have been omitted from this and later tables for the sake of clarity. Recorded totals for 1871 vary greatly among different sources.

Liebknicht are elected. Their colleagues are,– [August] Geib (Freiberg), Wahlteich [*sic* for Julius Vahlteich] (Mittweida), [Johann] Most (Chemnitz), [Julius] Motteler (Zwickau). I do not distinguish between Berlin [ADAV], and Eisenach [SDAP] Programmes, such details seeming unnecessary in a summary report.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/158 (final).

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 3, Dresden (January 31, 1874)

When a Reichstag candidate failed to win an absolute majority of votes in his electoral district on the first (main) election, a run-off election (Stichwahl) was held one or two weeks later, pitting the two leading vote-getters against each other. Such run-off elections were necessary in Dresden and Leipzig in 1874.

The result of the casting [run-off] elections for Dresden (Altstadt) and Leipzig county are now known.

In Dresden the Fortschritt [Progressive] candidate, [Eduard] Minckwitz, has obtained a majority of 1370, in 14,310 voters polled, over the Political-Democrat [Johann] Jacoby. From a comparison of numbers it appears, that the previous supporters of the National-Liberal Candidate have now voted in a body for the Fortschritt member, and that even the interest of a final struggle failed to stir the “Friends of the Empire”⁴² to proper electoral activity.

On the other hand the poll for Jacoby is 2,900 stronger than it was 3 weeks ago, a figure over which the “Enemies of the Empire”⁴³ are very jubilant. The Dresden “Volksbote” calls the success of Minckwitz a Pyrrhic victory, alleging that a very different result will be seen when the Social-Democrats bring forward one of their own men, who can command the official support of the party. I imagine that such an insinuation cuts both ways; for since Jacoby is a pure Political (not Social) Democrat, his candidature might naturally be acceptable, or tolerable, to radicals who recoil from the Programmes of Eisenach and Berlin.

Perhaps this circumstance may help to account for the surprising issue of the definite election for Leipzig county, where Jacoby⁴⁴ has obtained an easy victory over the National-Liberal, [Karl] Heine.⁴⁵

42 Strachey refers here to the German term *Reichsfreunde* (which was actually used by contemporaries less frequently than its opposite, *Reichsfeinde*, “enemies of the empire”).

43 Strachey means the Social Democrats.

44 Johann Jacoby (1805–77) ran as a Social Democratic candidate, having switched his allegiance from the Progressives to the socialists in protest against the trial and imprisonment of Bebel and Liebknecht in 1872. His relations with the Social Democrats soured, however, when he declined to take up the seat he won in January 1874 and when the SDAP lost the subsequent by-election. See Strachey’s report of December 3, 1874, below. Further details in Edmund Silberner, *Johann Jacoby* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg, 1976).

45 Karl Heine (1819–88) – a lawyer, manufacturer, estate-owner, and influential municipal reformer in Leipzig-Plagwitz – was in the process of moving from left to right.

Completing my previous muster of the parties in the Saxon contingent to the new German Parliament, ... I shall be near the truth in assuming, that whereas the “Friends of the Empire” previously had a majority of 15 or 16 in the Saxon quota of 23, their majority has now sunk to 3 or 4.⁴⁶

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/158.

George Strachey to Earl of Derby,⁴⁷ No. 6, Dresden (March 21, 1874)

In this report Strachey remarks on Saxon reactions to the Imperial Press Law, by means of which Bismarck and his ministers sought to stifle Social Democratic criticism in the press.⁴⁸ He uses a review of opinion about the law to confirm his view of the Germans’ propensity to stifle minorities, and “their extreme personal susceptibilities, and infirmity of temper, of their impatience, of ridicule, sarcasm, and contradiction.”

The Kingdom which possesses the chief seat of continental learning,⁴⁹ and claims, with the neighbouring Thuringian states, to be the historical centre of German civilization, might have been expected to make some sign of disapproval of the Imperial Press Law.⁵⁰

Since 1869 he had sat as a Progressive in the Saxon *Landtag*. He also ran as a Progressive in the Reichstag by-election of 1874. But in April 1874 he left the Progressive caucus as a result of the conflict over Bismarck’s military spending bill. By 1888 he had joined the Conservative caucus in the *Landtag*.

46 That is, thirteen Reichstag deputies for the Conservatives and National Liberals; ten deputies for the Progressives and SPD. For a map showing the winning party in all twenty-three Saxon Reichstag districts, see [map S.3.3](#) in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*. [Map S.3.4](#) in the Online Supplement shows twelve “party bastions” where the winning candidate won more than 60 per cent of the popular vote on the first ballot. This time the two liberal parties held only seven such districts; the Conservatives held five, and the Social Democrats held two: the seventeenth Saxon district of Glauchau-Meerane and the nineteenth district of Stollberg-Schneeberg.

47 Edward Henry Stanley (1826–93), British statesman, MP, 15th Earl of Derby after 1869, British foreign secretary 1866–8 and 1874–8.

48 See, inter alia, Keyserlingk, *Media Manipulation*; Gunda Stöber, *Pressepolitik als Notwendigkeit* (Stuttgart, 2000); Eberhard Naujoks, *Die parlamentarische Entstehung des Reichspressegesetzes in der Bismarckzeit (1848/74)* (Düsseldorf, 1976).

49 The University of Leipzig.

50 At the time of the dispatch the bill was going through its second reading and discussion in the Reichstag; after further compromises it was passed on April 25. The Impe-

An isolated demonstration has at length been made by the Author's Society of Leipzig, which has petitioned the Reichstag against the Bill.⁵¹ Their address complains that it is proposed to gag the journalistic thinkers of the great modern Culture-State with a severity worthy of the days of parental Government: that it is the proper function of the Reich to protect the separate countries, by confirming and widening their rights and liberties, instead of chaining them in Prussian fetters: that the relative freedom of speech always allowed in Saxony and extended by legislation only four years ago,⁵² would be generously curtailed by the extension to the Kingdom of the principles and practise of Northern coercion....

I have not observed in any of the Dresden organs of the "Friends of the Empire" a single analogous condemnation of the Bill. The National Liberal journal has not disapproved it.... Even the Fortschritt "Presse"⁵³ has barely insinuated a doubt as to the propriety of a return to the epoch of the Carlsbad conferences.⁵⁴ The Social-Democrat "Volksbote",⁵⁵ whose editors and contributors are perpetually going in and out of jail, does not venture to say much, but it points out that their party divides with the Centrum the honor of being the enemy for whom the projected weapons are to be forged.

I suspect that a large majority of the upper and middle class electors of Dresden would not be sorry to see the Bill restored to its' original Draconian shape.⁵⁶ I am not sure that they think with their deputy [Eduard] Minckwitz that "even Socialists and Clericals have rights." Against the Socialists extreme bitterness prevails because of their late display of electoral strength,⁵⁷ of strikes, rising wages, and the concomitant increase of prices so sharply felt in this capital now. The fact is, that although, according to a phrase in today's Presse, the Germans may have written on their Banner "Right and Freedom", their interpretation of

rial Press Law (*Reichspressegesetz*) of May 7, 1874 became effective on July 1, 1874; it introduced freedom of the press throughout the German Empire.

51 Petition by the Leipziger Schriftsteller-Verein; registered on March 8, 1874.

52 Through the Saxon Press Law of March 24, 1870.

53 *Dresdner Presse* (representing the German Progressive Party).

54 Carlsbad Conferences, August 6–31, 1819. On September 20, 1819, the German Federal Diet passed four laws on the basis of the Carlsbad Decrees, which made censorship of the press obligatory.

55 *Der Dresdner Volksbote: Organ für die Interessen des gesamten Volkes*.

56 Strachey is referring to the imperial government's original intention of including exemption clauses for the Catholic and socialist press.

57 In the Reichstag elections of January 10, 1874, when the SPD won 35.4 per cent of the popular vote in Saxony.

those words is very different from ours. Tolerance of dissident opinions is not a common German virtue, or ideal. On this head I can only say here, that no one with a tolerable knowledge of Germans, individually, and through their chief manifestations and controversies in the various branches of culture, can be unaware of their extreme personal susceptibilities, and infirmity of temper, of their impatience, of ridicule, sarcasm, and contradiction. So constituted, they easily sympathize with systems which punish energetic criticisms of public men and measures, and make minorities mute.

Source: The National Archives, London, FO 68/158.*

George Strachey to Earl of Derby, No. 21, Dresden (May 17, 1874)

Strachey reports on Social Democratic reactions to the imprisonment of three of their leading Reichstag deputies.

[Wilhelm] Liebknecht, (the Social Democrat deputy to Berlin for Schneeberg Circle [Saxony's nineteenth electoral district of Stollberg-Schneeberg]), was recently dismissed from [the fortress of] Königstein, his 2 years imprisonment having expired.⁵⁸ He was allowed his liberty for a short time and then again sent to prison, on an old sentence, of 3 weeks confinement, passed for "outrage" against a municipal councillor of Zwickau,⁵⁹ whom the Socialists had qualified as "unverständlich", an adjective whose force fluctuates between injudicious and foolish. His colleague [August] Bebel, (member for Glauchau) was discharged from the Fortress of Hubertsburg [*sic*] a few days ago. He has to return to jail for nine months, on an old condemnation for offensive expressions used against the late King of Saxony. He has received a short leave of absence between his terms of incarceration.⁶⁰

Your Lordship will doubtless have heard from South Germany of the arrest and conveyance to Berlin, of [Johann] Most,⁶¹ the Deputy to the

58 Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel had been sentenced for treason on March 26, 1872. They served the last months of their term in the Königstein Fortress near Dresden.

59 Edmund Urban.

60 Saxon authorities from time to time recognized that Bebel needed to attend to his business and gave him short leaves during or between prison sentences.

61 Johann Most (1846–1906) was arrested in Mainz on April 29, 1874, for a speech he had given on the anniversary of the Paris Commune (March 18) to an audience

Reichstag for Chemnitz,⁶² the Manchester of Central Germany. Like Raspail,⁶³ the Saxon politician spent a considerable part of his life in prison and these arrests do not much irritate him: he says that, in his objecting to travel in the “Schub”, or batch transport of criminals, the authorities allowed him to take a separate ticket, for which, however, and the special policeman’s journey, he was charged 36 Thalers, a sum he thought high. Wahlteich [*sic*],⁶⁴ member for Mittweida,⁶⁵ alleges that [Reichstag] President [Max von] Forckenbeck shews gross partiality in refusing to the Social Democrats their fair opportunities for addressing the Reichstag, and I have seen this charge frequently made. On Most, says his colleague, the president keeps his gag doubly or triply close, for his daily attempts to speak are utterly fruitless.

The stifled rage of the party is easily read between the lines of mild, statistical, narrative in which they record these matters, as well as the arrests of minor partizans, prohibitions and interruptions of meetings, dissolutions of Unions, and other daily acts of official interference. The protest of [Progressive deputy] Herr [August] Walter⁶⁶ ... is the second case I have come across of anyone not a Social-Democrat questioning the wisdom or legality of the present system of coercion. Whether in politics, literature, [or] science, Germans practice and admire a Barbarossa like energy, in the repression and extirpation of an opposing tend [*sic* for tendency]. I hope I am in [the] wrong in my belief that the Governments of Germany are going the way to intensify the disease they dread, to widen the circle of its’ contagion, and

of Berlin workmen. He was subsequently put on trial and sentenced to twenty-six months’ detention. Most was a journalist and SPD member of the Reichstag (1874–6). He was repeatedly arrested for his attacks on patriotism, religion, and ethics. After advocating violent action, including the use of bombs, as a mechanism to bring about revolutionary change – he is known for the phrase “propaganda of the deed” – Most was forced into exile by German authorities, having already been disavowed by Bebel and other leaders of the SPD. He edited the anarchist newspaper *Freiheit* in London from 1879 to 1881, and, after serving a prison sentence, he emigrated to the United States, where he continued his anarchist propaganda.

62 Saxony’s sixteenth electoral district.

63 Referring to François-Vincent Raspail (1794–1878), a French chemist, naturalist, physician, physiologist, attorney, and socialist politician.

64 Julius Wahlteich.

65 Saxony’s fifteenth electoral district.

66 In a sitting of the second chamber of the Saxon *Landtag*, on April 30, 1874, August Walter criticized the illiberal policy of the German Empire and the National Liberals – especially in press affairs.

to associate with it class passions menacing not only to Governments but to civilization.

Source: The National Archives, London, FO 68/158.*

George Strachey to Earl of Derby, No. 38, Dresden (November 13, 1874)

Strachey discusses a Social Democratic loss in a by-election in the electoral district of Borna. He believes the National Liberals are incorrect to see this loss as a sign of diminishing SPD strength in Saxony, and notes that a general fear of the party among bourgeois Germans, not just among the police and aristocrats, contributes to the obstacles it faces during election campaigns. "[E]very kind of obstacle was thrown in their way wherever they attempted to hold a meeting," he writes, "and ... in the town of Borna, and many other places, they could not even obtain a Committee room." Strachey nevertheless concludes that a Socialist defeat was probably a good thing; a victory might have provided the occasion for draconian Reich legislation against the party.

Herr von Könneritz⁶⁷ has carried the 14th Circle [Saxon electoral district of Borna] by 3901 votes. At the general election [in January 1874] his majority was only 1090. The Social-Democrat [Wilhelm Fink]⁶⁸ has lost 3000 votes; about 13,000 electors did not poll.

The 'Friends of the Empire' are jubilant at this result, but some of the reluctant supporters of Herr von Könneritz know the meaning of a victory obtained by the unnatural coalition of the Ultra-Conservative, National-Liberal, and Progressive parties.⁶⁹ The National-Liberals make

67 Léonçe Robert von Könneritz (1835–90), was son-in-law of former Saxon government leader Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust and brother to Richard von Könneritz, president of the Saxon upper chamber. He was a co-founder of the State Association of Saxon Conservatives in 1875, having sat in the Saxon *Landtag* since 1866. He served as district governor (*Amtshauptmann*, or AHM) of Chemnitz (1864–74), AHM of Zwickau (1875–6), and AHM of Leipzig (1876). He was ennobled in 1874. He was Saxony's minister of finance from 1876 until 1890.

68 Wilhelm Fink (1833–90) was a staff member of the Cooperative Book Printers enterprise (Genossenschaftsbuchdruckerei) in Leipzig, which published the *Volksstaat* and *Vorwärts*. He was repeatedly an SPD candidate in the fourteenth Saxon district of Mittweida.

69 Könneritz represented the Imperial and Free Conservative Party in the Reichstag until his appointment as minister of finance.

the amazing reflection that the missing 3000 votes must measure the numerical strength lost to the Social Democratic “Fraction” [party group or caucus] between January and November; of the alternate fits of electoral activity and torpor which seize political parties they have never heard.

The [Social Democratic] [Dresdner] “Volksbote” explains that their men have gone about saying – ‘it is all no use: Bismarck does what he likes anyhow.’ This sentiment extends beyond the Social Democrat camp, and a sense of their parliamentary impotence may naturally have been more present to the adherents of the Eisenach programme now than during the excitement of the general election [in January 1874] when, moreover, the actual industrial depression, with its’ fall of wages, reduction of establishments etc. had scarcely set in.

According to the Social-Democrat Organs the official machinery of the circle was worked under high pressure for Herr von Könneritz, but this is not a point on which they can safely expatiate. They also say that every kind of obstacle was thrown in their way wherever they attempted to hold a meeting, and that in the town of Borna, and many other places, they could not even obtain a Committee room. Of the Innkeepers who refused, some said they dared not “get into hot water with the Police and the Grandees”, others that they were just about to commence architectural alterations in the particular locality required. On this I must remark, that the disobliging dispositions named do not depend on the insinuations of either Police or Grandees, but on standing class antipathies and fears.

The defeat of the Social-Democrats seems to me to be a satisfactory result. Their successes in January excited general alarm and anger, and a new victory might have suggested at Berlin that the time was come to aggravate that coercitive [*sic*] method which the Germans, from ‘the Leaders of the Policy’ downwards, imagine to be an infallible bridle for fanatical minorities. The gag is already in partial activity, and it seems to be a powerful stimulus to the opinions and evils it is meant to check. Believing that firebrands enough have been flung about Germany of late, I conclude that this is no time for more empirical legislation, so that, on the whole the victory of Herr von Könneritz may be called a fortunate incident, although his personal contribution’s [*sic*] to parliamentary progress will probably have about the same value as those which might have been expected from the windy Socialist bookseller Fink.



Figure 8. “A Safe Hideout for Editors.” The Social Democratic satirical magazine *Der Wahre Jacob* published this cartoon in 1903. On the wall is a list of “prison regulations.” As George Strachey writes in his December 3, 1874 report, “I presume that no Saxon Social-Democrat can sit down to write a political paragraph or article without feeling that he has already put one foot in prison.”

Source: “Das ‘sichere Versteck’ eines sozialdemokratischen Redakteurs,” *Der Wahre Jacob* (Stuttgart), Jg. 20, 1903, Nr. 429 (January 1, 1903): 3936 / Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.

George Strachey to Earl of Derby, No. 42, Dresden (December 3, 1874)

In this long report Strachey outlines the breadth of legal and other forms of repression intended to slow or stop the growth of the Social Democratic movement. However, he notes that the repression he describes afflicts “the Saxon proletarian class” as a whole. Such repression had escalated dramatically since 1871 and was one reason the two wings of Social Democracy – Bebel’s “Eisenachers” in the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Germany, and the “Lassalleans” in the General German Workers’ Association – settled their differences and joined forces at the Gotha Party Congress of May 1875 to form the Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany.⁷⁰ Strachey’s broad brush paints the predicament of Social Democratic journalists in dark hues. He notes that persecution of Social Democracy by the police and civil servants is accepted as normal by Saxon citizens, writing, “The natural alacrity of a highly conservative

70 See Strachey’s report of March 13, 1875, below.

class, which itself looks on the demos as a wild and intractable beast, ... may be trusted to make the best use of laws tendentiously devised, and of the resources of constructive and spurious interpretation."

The Kingdom of Saxony is, as you are aware, the chief stronghold of German Social-Democracy. At the general election ten months ago [January 1874] about half of the entire poll⁷¹ fell to that party, which but for Dr. [Johann] Jacoby's refusal to sit for Leipzig County,⁷² would have had 7 votes at Berlin, the complete Saxon parliamentary quota being 23, the whole Social-Democratic contingent to the Reichstag 9 members strong. The meaning of these figures as indications of the growth of the Social-Democratic power was explained in my correspondence of the time. On the present occasion I propose to describe the position of the Saxon proletarian class as regards freedom of the press, and the rights of public meeting, and association.

1. If Your Lordship remarked that the Saxon Social-Democrat [Wilhelm] Liebknecht said in the Reichstag, that he had not heard the grounds of the condemnation of his associate Hasenclever,⁷³ you will learn without surprise that the whole subject is a dark one, even when studied on the spot. The politicians and journals of the respectable 'Fractions' maintain a considerable silence about Social-Democracy. This arises, partly from ~~the indisposition of the Germans peculiarities of the nature of the German mind, which is content to remain uninformed about minorities until the moment comes for trying to thrash them;~~ partly, from the difficulty of ascertaining the facts and merits of trials which from the inferior degree of culpability involved are excluded from the category of Jury cases, and so conducted chiefly by secret procedure. So that when a meeting is dispersed by the Police, or an Editor sent to jail for a year, mention of the incident is seldom made except by the Social-Democratic organs. Even these are, at times disappointingly, though no doubt wisely, brief: as, for instance this recent notice:— "partizan Pietschmann will enter next

71 In fact, 35.4 per cent; see [table 5](#).

72 See Strachey's report of January 31, 1874, above.

73 Wilhelm Hasenclever (1837–89), was a tanner by trade and early member of the ADAV, serving as its president from 1871 until it merged with the SDAP at the Gotha Congress in 1875. Under Hasenclever's leadership the ADAV grew from about 5300 members (1871) to more than 19,000 members (1873–4), but August Bebel and many "Eisenachers" distrusted and disliked him. The newspaper he co-founded with Wilhelm Hasselmann, *Der Neue Sozial-Demokrat*, had more than 11,000 subscribers. For his publications, Hasenclever served multiple criminal sentences, usually between one and three months, for crimes such as "publicly encouraging criminal acts." He was a Reichstag deputy from 1874 to 1881 and, with Wilhelm Liebknecht, co-founder of the new party newspaper, *Vorwärts*. He emigrated to the United States in 1881.

Monday in a term of 4 months imprisonment at Bautzen, for libelous language against the King alleged to have been used during the last electoral campaign". It is not likely that any further Explanations will be given, nor without making private enquiries could a Saxon ascertain why a Leipzig National-Liberal paper one day curtly announced that its' Editor was sentenced to six months imprisonment.

2. Liberty of the Press.

Under this head are arranged cases noted within the last ten months, but only intermittently, and not in view of an eventual report like the present, so that the facts given are of unequal importance. Perhaps a miscellaneous series is more instructive than a deliberate collection of "prerogative instances".

Four Social Democratic Organs are published in Saxony: the Dresden 'Volksbote' is taken in for the Legation; my dislike of some of its' contents need not prevent my saying that its' habitual tone and language are moderate. Last months [*sic*] this journal was the subject of 7 or 8 prosecutions. One article was inculpated for an impertinent description of an arrest for Press offence. Another article as reflecting on the administration of Justice because the writer avowed he could not understand why a prisoner sentenced for a term should not work at his trade. A third, because the writer declared himself unable to name the barriers which limit the arbitrary power of the lower judicial functionaries. The 'Volksbote' had fêted the anniversary of Sedan with a satirical poem, for which a prosecution ensued. Ridicule being afterwards thrown on official interference in so small a matter, the Attorney General prosecuted again for the new offence. Two other numbers facetiously described the dispersal of a meeting by 18 policemen "in tin caps" who "marched in phalanx against a residue of beer glasses and maid servants". This picture was held to constitute a Beleidigung (libel, insult), and a fresh prosecution was instituted. A few days later a new Editor resuméd in a single article the various complaints lodged against his predecessor, who was now in prison. This brought him within the range of punishment at compound interest. The review itself was incriminated, both on general grounds, and because the repetition of the term "Tin-caps" betrayed a design to nickname the Police. Sir Robert Peel had no great capacity for humour, but he was presumably amused rather than offended, when he first heard his creation called 'Peelers' or 'Perliss'.⁷⁴

74 Sir Robert Peel (1788–1850) created the Metropolitan Police Service in London in 1829. He served twice as British prime minister (1834–5 and 1841–6) and twice as home secretary (1822–7 and 1828–30).

Judgment has not yet been delivered on the above cases. No one sentence would be very heavy but the penal aggregate may easily amount to incarceration for a year or longer. The Chemnitz ‘Freie-Presse’ shewed some time since that every number issued cost above 3 days of editorial imprisonment. That journal has now 3 editors in jail; not long ago the ‘Volksbote’ was in the same predicament. The third Chemnitz editor has been sentenced for 15 months imprisonment for “a series” of indictments whose nature is not specified. The following is a curious case of accumulated prosecution. A journalist threw out some sneers & other (doubtless offensive) remarks respecting the arrest and punishment of a partizan. This brought him under a convergence of charges from all the authorities concerned in the affair from the policeman who arrested to the judge who sentenced. There must have been at least 5 or 6 prosecutions: I never saw the result of the trials.

In the sentence of the Saxon deputy [Johann] Most the Berlin Stadtgericht [municipal court] construed certain expressions as criminal because of their use before a Social-Democratic audience. A Saxon advocate has recently propounded, and a Court accepted an analogous doctrine. Two Social Democrats disapproving a certain item in a town budget attacked the Communal council through the press and advised the municipal electors another time to chose [*sic*] more watchful representatives. The usual prosecution followed. The advocate of the offended Commune argued, that even if the incriminated article were based on truth its’ form was libelous, as the defendants were Social-Democrats. The case was pending two years and decided quite recently in second instance by the imprisonment of one deputy for 4, the other for 2, weeks.

...

The above details are ... wanting in precision, and they afford no measure of the frequency of prosecution. I think, however, that I have probably mustered the majority of apposite cases. On the other hand account must be taken not only of active but also of passive repression, that is to say, of the forbearances imposed by the existing state of things. Opinions on such a point must be free from subjective impressions, but I presume that no Saxon Social-Democrat can sit down to write a political paragraph or article without feeling that he has already put one foot in prison. The liberty of effective newspaper discussion of public persons and things is not enjoyed by the Saxon demos. It is positive that the Social Democrats are subjected to a differential severity of treatment, although justice might seem to suggest that the style of a former journeyman turner like [August] Bebel, a book binder like [Johann] Most, a cobbler like [Julius] Vahlteich (lately Editor of the Chemnitz Fr. Presse) might seem to be entitled to a wider margin of energy and vituperation than that prescribed for Professors of good birth like [Heinrich von] Sybel and [Heinrich] von Treitschke.

3. Freedom of Speech.

Arrest for utterances at public meetings do not often occur, for prosecution is vigorously applied. At every meeting or lecture which can be qualified as public, police agents attend, by whom, if a speaker attempts to discuss matters not named in the programme necessarily submitted beforehand by the police, or a single remark is made which the agents disapprove, the Chairman is at once to [*sic*] required to interfere. Should he be slow with the call to order[,] the agents threaten him with consequences: should he persist in his refusal they disperse the meeting. Like other individuals, a ‘Tin-Cap’ will have a ‘personal equation’, so that while one policeman thunders out his categorical orders on the smallest provocation, another will listen to the Chairman’s defence, or descend to criticize them or the offensive phrase, and, perhaps even withdraw his objections. But, on the whole, the speaker is generally gagged before the words are well out of his mouth.

The workmen’s meetings are constantly broken up by the police. Of such incidents the ‘*Volksbote*’ alone would speak and I am reduced to their partial testimony for a knowledge of what happens: however[,] the fear of a prosecution for ‘*Beleidigung*’ and falsification of facts prevents grave distortions of the truth. Not long ago, a speaker who had been describing the present degrees of German liberty in a style which the police agent had disapproved, went on to say – “and I cannot tell, for instance, whether when I wake tomorrow the Police will not be at my bedside to apprehend me.” At this the Chairman was required to order the speaker to sit down, and on his refusing the police dissolved the meeting; under such circumstances the orator would probably be arrested in addition. Irreligious observations are ~~always generally~~ always checked. According to a recent decision of a Berlin court the persons of the Deity and the Kaiser are sacred from discussion. Of almost equal sanctity are the military institutions of the Empire. A certain [Ignaz] Auer maintained in a speech that the system of one-year army Volunteers granted a class privilege, a fact which no sane person would deny, although only a Social Democrat would Auer and his friends would find fault with so fair sensible an institution. For this remark Auer was punished with ten days imprisonment. In August the Social Democrat [Max] Kayser[,]⁷⁵ talking of Political

75 Max Kayser (1853–88) sprang from a Jewish family in Breslau. In the 1870s he edited a number of SPD newspapers in Mainz, Chemnitz, and Leipzig. After 1874 he edited the *Dresdner Volksbote* (later renamed the *Dresdner Volkszeitung*). Between 1880 and 1887 he co-owned (with his brother-in-law August Kaden) a tobacco and cigar shop in Dresden: it was a well-known meeting place for Social Democrats. He sat in the Reichstag from 1878 to 1887 and was considered one of the caucus’s most right-wing members and thus, according to Marx and Engels, unreliable. During the Anti-Socialist Law he was banished from many towns and cities, sometimes having

Economy, contrasted the workers with the drones of society, naming as illustrative types of the drone class “monks and officers”. Baron [Alfred] von Fabrice the Saxon Minister of War is an intelligent man of the world, who, after Prince Bismarck’s return to Germany in 1871 was appointed his representative in France. The General has now instituted a prosecution against Kayser for a calumnious libel on the offices of the Army: the Catholic Vicar General has not yet moved.

A lecturer in a provincial Saxon town asserted that the clergy (or church) had turned the earth into a hell, and that the Bible contained falsehoods. The Attorney General prosecuted: the court dismissed the first charge, but only because the evidence as to fact was contradictory, and the second charge because the apposite Paragraph in the new German Penal Code seemed to allow such a criticism to be delivered in the way of a scientific opinion. The Attorney General appealed to have the last part of the decision quashed as an erroneous interpretation of law. No careful Saxon ‘Enemy of the Empire’ [i.e., a particularist] allows the name of the Emperor or Prince Bismarck to pass his lips in public. A young Livonian nobleman who was studying at Leipsig made a speech in the academic debating club in which he dropped a remark which, said a respectable journal, “seemed to involve” an injurious reflection on the Kaiser. This coming to the ears of the Attorney General he ordered the student[’]s arrest: no grave offence being substantiated the Livonian was released after two days confinement. I have seen, but not noted[,] cases of the same sort referring to Prince Bismarck. Lately a tipsy glazier, who was swaggering in a beerhouse, said it was a pity [Eduard] Kullmann had missed the Chancellor [in an assassination attempt of July 13, 1874], and that he was ready to do for him himself (or equivalent words). This stuff is magnified into a serious intention, and the man arrested, but the Public Prosecutor’s complaint seeming unusually trivial, the Court dismissed the charge.

What was said as to gagging speakers in the middle of dangerous sentences applies only to the partizans of the inferior class. ~~But like the Duke of Alba German justice can distinguish between small reptiles and great fishes.~~⁷⁶ Leaders, especially members of the Reichstag, like Bebel, Liebknecht, or Most, are allowed as much rope as they will take. For

nowhere to sleep except in a railway car. In numerous prosecutions for press offences, Kayser was sentenced to more than eighteen months in prison. After his death in March 1888, 3,000 mourners attended his funeral in Breslau.

76 Fernando Álvarez de Toledo (1507–82), the third Duke of Alba, was a Spanish general and governor of the Spanish Netherlands (1567–73). He was nicknamed “the Iron Duke” by Protestants of the Low Countries because of his harsh rule and persecution of heretics.

instance Most (member for Chemnitz) was allowed to talk himself into prison for 19 months. His condemnation just discussed in the Reichstag, occurred in Berlin but the theories involved are as much Saxon as Prussian. The sentence of the 7th Berlin Stadtgericht illustrates better than any mere generalization of mine could do this sharpness of the sword which hangs over the head of any Saxon, or German, Social Democrat of mark who treats high political topics in public. The sentence declares that Most's arguments in favor of the legal basis of the Paris commune might be permissible in the Versailles Assembly, or before a learned audience, or at a meeting of the Commune's enemies, but that spoken before presumed sympathizers with that institution they acquired a criminal character. Again – the declarations of the Saxon bookbinder, that the ideals of Social Democracy are to be reached by peaceful paths, must not be taken in their natural sense. "Between the lines and words" must be read in Most's real meaning, viz. that the final solution, or 'revenge', may not after all turn out to be so very peaceful, and that its' nature will depend on the good or bad conduct of the dominant classes.... About the time of Most's trial, an agitator of the 'Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverein' (or Schweizer-Bismarckian Socialist faction) was prosecuted for discussing the alternatives reform and revolution. His language was far stronger than that of Most, but the same 7th Court dismissed the charge, because – considering the possibility of a revolution to be at present so distant – the defendant's words would not support an active meaning.

4. The position of the Social Democrats as regards

The Right of Association may be described in a few lines. Every society whose activity embraces political, religious, social, or educational, objects, must submit a full account of its' aim, organization, governing body &c to the Police, who can prohibit or dissolve such society as they think fit. No association may combine or correspond with parent, filial, or similar bodies elsewhere by committees, deputations, or letters. A Social-Democratic Union in Dresden may not be in communication with a like society in Meissen, or Leipzig, or with the Central Committee of Five. – A Saxon adherent of either of the German Socialist parties⁷⁷ must keep his participation within the bounds of separate, individual, membership: associated subscribers must rigorously refrain from collective local action.

This, I need not explain, is the prevailing law of Germany. Its' provisions were the basis of the razzias⁷⁸ of July and August on the Prussian

⁷⁷ The ADAV and the SDAP.

⁷⁸ Razzias: hostile raids for purposes of conquest, plunder, and capture of slaves, especially as carried out by Moors in North Africa.

and Hessian Roman Catholic Clubs, on the Prussian branches of the ‘Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiter-Verein’, on the Bavarian branches of the Social Democratic ‘Arbeiterpartei’. A Saxon Union has been closed at Zwickau, and one or two other like cases have occurred elsewhere. But the law, though precise, is difficulty [*sic*] to apply, on which ground National-Liberal feelers were lately put out in favour of an Imperial Vereinsgesetz [association law].

5. Additional repressive action.

The machinery now described may strike Your Lordship as powerful enough. Behind it, however[,] stands a supplementary apparatus of discretionary Police power. Every one on whom a corrective sentence is passed, even for the most trifling malum prohibitum,⁷⁹ falls to the category of persons liable to surveillance. A Saxon so classed may not change his residence without leave, and the police may prohibit his living in a given place. But a non-Saxon under surveillance is liable to Expulsion from the Kingdom. A foreign German, [August Bernhard] Muth, formerly Editor of the Leipzig Volksstaat was sentenced to 6 days imprisonment for openly declaring, in the face of a police prohibition, that he was ready, if required, to accept a mandate for the Brussels International Congress. To the sentence was tacked the above named corollary, and Muth was expelled [from] the Saxon territory. The partizan [Ignaz] Auer, who is a Bavarian, was likewise expelled from Dresden on the ground of a punishment inflicted on him in Prussia, where, however the Police had not subsequently troubled him.

When the respectable political parties come on the Police horizon a different mode of appreciation prevails. The Editors of the ‘Presse’ (Fortschritt), who are foreign Germans, were condemned to four weeks imprisonment for libel on the Saxon Government, concerning which, as it happened before my arrival in Dresden I have no exact information. On their appeal to mercy, the 4 weeks were reduced to 3 days arrest. Last spring came the order to quit Saxony[,] against which they petitioned, receiving, of course permission to remain. These cases have occurred in the teeth of the Reichsgesetz which guarantees ‘Freizügigkeit’ [freedom of movement] throughout Germany. The affair of Muth was brought before the Chamber, which threw the weight of a Committee Report and two divisions [i.e., plenary votes] into the scale of the police, although the legality of such Expulsions was much questioned.

6. This, My Lord, is the position of the Social-Democrats of Saxony. There has been no special inroad on them, as lately in Prussia and Bavaria: the picture drawn is of a normal state of things, which prevails not

79 Latin: “an offence prohibited by statute but not inherently evil or wrong.”

only in the Kingdom, but throughout the Empire, wherever Social Democracy has a visible, concentrated life. The ~~Saxon~~ judges and ~~tribunals~~ police are not more vindictive here than elsewhere: they might almost be called more humane. Liebknecht specially stated in the Reichstag that in Saxony political offenders were treated “like gentlemen”. I do not think that any arbitrary element often enters into the Saxon arrests and trials. Prosecutions and condemnations run mechanically in their traditional groove. There is no need for that ministerial pressure on Public Prosecutors and Judges which, according to Herr [Rudolf] Gneist, was not so very long ago freely exercised at Berlin. The natural alacrity of a highly conservative class, which itself looks on the ~~demos~~ as a wild and intractable beast, and knows that the dominant ~~classes~~ majority approves and demands a Draconian asperity of coercion, may be trusted to make the best use of laws tendentiously devised, and of the resources of constructive and spurious interpretation.

The present Despatch is, no doubt, crowded with local facts of secondary and transient interest. I thought, however, that Your Lordship would prefer a study of details, however tedious, to a collection of unsupported generalisations. Perhaps some useful oblique lights have been thrown on Prince Bismarck’s late complaint of the growing “savagery” of the German people, of the revolt of their “subjective conscience” against “mild laws”, of the advance, under an insipid educational system, of the spirit of “criticism and resistance.”

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/158 (final).

George Strachey to Earl of Derby, No. 9, Dresden (March 13, 1875)

*Strachey comments on the situation of German Social Democracy on the eve of the fusion of its “Eisenach” and “Lassalleian” wings at the Gotha Party Congress in May 1875.*⁸⁰

The Leipzig “Volksstaat” the organ of the “Socialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei”, or “Bebelianer”, has just published a manifesto from the heads of the two groups into which German Social Democracy fell after the death of Lassalle, proposing a Programme and Rules for a United Social Democratic party, and convoking a Congress in May for their discussion, and eventual acceptance.⁸¹ Among the signatories are [Wilhelm]

⁸⁰ This report was marked for the attention of Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli.

⁸¹ The program – drafted in a pre-conference on February 14 and 15, 1875, and published in the SPD’s newspaper *Der Volksstaat* on March 7 – was presented to

Hassellmann [*sic*], deputy to the Reichstag for Elberfeld: and [Wilhelm] Hasenclever, member for Altona, and President of the “Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverein”⁸² founded by [Ferdinand] Lassalle for specifically Socialist objects during the Berlin Constitutional conflict of 1863,⁸³ in opposition to the Self-Help movement of [Hermann] Schulze-Delitzsch, which its’ author was pressing into the service of the Prussian Liberal party and the German unitary agitation. For the “Bebelianer”, also called “Eisenach honorables”, (from the place where the schism of 1869 occurred),⁸⁴ stand the names of the Saxon deputies [Wilhelm] Liebknecht, [Julius] Motzeler, [August] Geib, [Julius] Vahlteich: [August] Bebel and [Johann] Most being in prison could not sign.⁸⁵

As regards the leaders the appearances of agreement are decisive. I may remind Your Lordship that the division into groups was confirmed by the subsequent suspicions of connivance with Prince Bismarck fastened on Lassalle’s successor, Dr. [Johann Baptiste von] Schweizer [*sic*], and the partially national attitude of the A.D. “Arbeiterverein” as also by the Internationalist learnings of the “Bebelianer”, who in Saxony exhibited a violent Particularism, and were accused of taking money from the King of Hanover. But with these circumstances was associated no fundamental difference of programme, so that after Dr. Schweizer had been expelled from the Union of the “Lassalleaner”, and the “Bebelianer” throwing off the influence of Marx, had taken a less cosmopolitan, and more German, line, no ground of separation seemed to survive except the unimportant one that the “Bebelianer” were, on the whole, a South German, Saxon,

the Gotha Congress and resulted in the foundation of the Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany (Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands, SAPD). See *Protokoll des Vereinigungs-Congresses der Sozialdemokraten Deutschlands, abgehalten zu Gotha vom 22. bis 27. Mai 1875* (Leipzig, 1875), 78–9, in *GHDI*, vol. 4, sec. 7.

82 General German Workers’ Association (ADAV), founded in Leipzig on 23 May 1863. See the earlier note.

83 The Prussian constitutional conflict (1860–66, which reached its peak in 1863) revolved around the plans for the reorganization of the army. It resulted in a power struggle between Prussian King Wilhelm I, his ministry, and the liberal chamber of deputies; the Prussian chamber advocated parliamentary rights against the monarchy and its executive.

84 The SDAP was founded on August 8, 1869, in Eisenach. See the earlier note.

85 Liebknecht played a central and rather duplicitous role in preparing the ground for the merger. August Bebel was in prison in the winter of 1874–5, leaving Liebknecht to negotiate the terms of the merger with the Lassalleans. When Marx and Engels in London got wind of the many compromises Liebknecht was willing to make for the sake of unity, Marx wrote his famous *Critique of the Gotha Program*. He sent it to Liebknecht, intending it to be passed on to Bebel and another leading member of their party, Wilhelm Bracke. But Liebknecht did not forward Marx’s text, believing that unity was more important than doctrinal purity. At the time, Bebel (and others) were incensed by Liebknecht’s high-handedness.

and Thuringian party, the “Lassalleaner” belonging principally to North Germany. There was no serious obstacle to a fusion of the groups, which Prince Bismarck’s recent Socialist Crusade, simultaneously carried on in Prussia, Hesse-Darmstadt, and Bavaria was admirably calculated to suggest and facilitate.⁸⁶ The manifesto expressly refers the present result to the pressure put on the Social Democrats by the violent persecution to which they are exposed. The signatories might take a malicious pleasure in ascribing an eventual fusion to the coercive policy of Prince Bismarck, but there is, I imagine, no doubt that the Reichskanzler has been their best friend.

The new Programme, which is in studiously moderate language, includes three articles: the following gives a condensed version of them.

1. Wealth and culture spring from labour, whose fruits belong to the entire social body, in and through which, alone, productive labour is possible.

The instruments and means of labour being now in the hands of the Capitalist class, whose monopoly causes misery and bondage (Knechtschaft), the class of workmen must emancipate labour, and raise its’ instruments to be a common possession of Society, in view of an associated distribution of work and its’ products.

The class of workmen must strive to attain these objects conformably to the possibilities offered by the existing National State, in the conviction that the result of their efforts would be an international confraternity of peoples.

2. The German workmen’s party must try by all legal means to achieve the Socialist organization: the abolition of wages, with their “brazen law” (law of Lassalle, or, as we should say, of [David] Ricardo), as well as of “every social and political disability.”⁸⁷

3. Productive-Associations with “State-Help”, on a scale adequate for a complete organization of labour, both in Industry & Agriculture. Universal suffrage, parliamentary and communal. Popular legislative initiative and Veto (after Swiss models). Popular army and universal service. Abolition of restrictive laws on the Press, Associations and Meetings. Popular and gratuitous justice. Compulsory and gratuitous education: no class schools. Freedom of Science and conscience. Progressive Income Tax.

These are the Reforms of the Future. Present demands are: – Recognition of the right of coalition. Institution of normal work-day and prohibition

86 Strachey is referring to the ban on local branches of socialist parties; on March 18, 1875, the ADAV was outlawed in Prussia.

87 According to Lassalle’s “iron law of wages,” a labourer works at his cost price; thus wages under the conditions of unrestricted competition do not exceed the margin of subsistence.

of Sunday labour. Limitation of female, and prohibition of child, labour. Official inspection of Industrial establishments; Regulations of Prison work.

On reference to the Eisenach programme of 1869, I find the Socialist movement called a Kampf[,] a battle or struggle, which notion is now superseded by a less energetic and more general description applicable to a regular constitutional agitation. The phrase “by all legal means” is new. Again, the Eisenach “honourables” expressly constituted themselves a filial of the International, while the new creed makes a mere vaporous allusion to a brotherhood of peoples, which is now conceived, not, as before, as a means, but as a result. A previous categorical denunciation of “Privileges of Rank, Birth, and Confession” is replaced by the vague remarks given under 2. “Separation of Church and State, of School and Church” was an article of the Eisenach programme, and is now dropped. The guarantee of “State Credit” for the National Productive Association is dropped, and “State-help” substituted.

On the religious point I would observe, that the Mainz Congress of “Bebelianer” in 1872 adopted a resolution recommending to members a formal renunciation of their respective churches. This is the style of Bakounin [*sic* for Mikhail Bakunin], and is disapproved by the “Lassalle-
aner”, who generally leave such questions untouched. The present abstention was, I presume, dictated by the desire to make the Programme acceptable to Roman Catholic workmen, who, unlike their Protestant fellows, would be shocked by disrespect to religion – to catch the sympathies of the “Christian Socialists” – to avoid even indirect approval of Prussian ecclesiastical policy.

“State-Credit” is the old Lassallean Shibboleth, and has been attacked by some “Bebelianer” as implying a recognition of the National State. Lassalle proposed to maintain his Productive Associations (which Louis Blanc would claim as his National Workshops) by issues of State-Paper. His Assignats have been much ridiculed, and it was prudent for his present followers to acquiesce in a vague demand for “State-Help”, which, as nobody can understand, nobody can criticise.

These matters, are, as stated in my Report on the Saxon Social Democrats, too low for the Respectable Press of Germany. In no Dresden journal have I seen any allusion to the subject. Of the prospects of the fusion I can have no knowledge. I should observe, however, that the present move has been the subject of long discussion and negotiation. Supposing it to succeed, its effects could hardly be more than passive until the present severe industrial depression has passed away.

George Strachey to Earl of Derby, No. 3, Dresden (January 24, 1877)

The Reichstag elections of January 1877 produced unexpected victories for the Social Democratic Party – in Germany generally and, as in 1874, in the Kingdom of Saxony (see table 6, below). Although higher voter turnout in 1877 was responsible for part of the SPD's gain, its vote total increased 34 per cent over 1874. The worries of bourgeois Saxons about this development are reflected in Strachey's report. Conversely, Strachey expresses justified surprise that even in "high circles," some Saxons would rather support August Bebel than a National Liberal representative of "centralizing" tendencies.

One third of the Elections here having been ties,⁸⁸ nothing definite can yet be said on the composition of the Saxon Contingent to the Reichstag. The Social-Democrats already fill their old number of 6 seats, and are contesting 5 more where they had relative majorities (as in Dresden) or large minorities. They have polled 125,000 votes, against about 93,000 in 1874 and 44,000 in 1871. The Conservatives – a very vague word in Germany – have 5 seats, the National-Liberals 3 seats, the entire polls having been respectively 80,000 and 79,000. The [Progressive] Fortschritt party has only 1 member, with two chances in the casting [run-off] elections.

Great efforts are being made by the National Liberals to secure the return of their candidate Dr. Mayhoff,⁸⁹ for Dresden. The argument that it would be a scandal for Saxony if the capital were represented by [August] Bebel, has been urged on the Conservatives, whose wire-pullers are exhorting their friends to vote for Mayhoff. But many of that party argue, – that as the phantasies of the Social Democratic programme are not coming on for discussion at present, while the dangers from Centralisation are actually at the doors, the important thing is to choose a stout Particularist, a condition fulfilled by Bebel, whereas Mayhoff doubtless harbours annexionist designs.⁹⁰

88 That is, where no candidate won an absolute majority in the first round of balloting, requiring a run-off ballot. Therefore the election results are still incomplete.

89 Karl Mayhoff (b. 1841) was a classical philologist who received his doctorate from the University of Breslau in 1865. He joined the Vitzthum Gymnasium in Dresden as a senior instructor in 1869 and was awarded the title of professor in 1872.

90 In 1866, Saxon National Liberals such as Heinrich von Treitschke, Gustav Freytag, and Karl Biedermann lobbied for Prussia to annex the Kingdom of Saxony outright rather than welcome it as a junior partner in the North German Confederation. From that point on, Saxon Conservatives, and many groups in the court and the civil service that supported them, distrusted National Liberals as unpatriotic Saxons and enablers of Bismarck's "centralizing" plans. In his draft report of May 19, 1875, Strachey

These considerations and the utter obscurity of the National Liberal candidate, who is a mere usher [*sic*] in a Gymnasium, make it doubtful whether the Conservatives will come to the poll in decisive numbers, so that as the Fortschritt Committee has declined to recommend either candidate to their party, and the Social-Democrats did not poll all their men at the first election, Bebel's chances of success are not inconsiderable. In high quarters I find that people are prepared for a Social-Democratic victory, and the antipathy to the Saxon Lassalle⁹¹ is less than might have been expected.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/161 (final).

George Strachey to Earl of Derby, No. 5, Dresden (January 27, 1877)

August Bebel has won the run-off ballot to represent Dresden in the Reichstag. As Strachey reports, "The moral triumph is greater than the numerical." Dresden is renowned as a comfortable, conservative city for courtiers, civil servants, and pensioners, making Bebel's victory all the more surprising. In his next report (June 15, 1877), Strachey notes that Bebel probably won the seat as a result of "the mixed effect of improved [SPD] electoral energy, a fortuitous accession of strength from particularists and disappointed officials, a certain positive spread of Social-Democratic opinion, and the German system of persecution." Saxon authorities were constantly worried about the political reliability of lower civil servants, who were generally poorly paid.

Following the example set at Berlin, Dresden has returned a Social Democrat.⁹² The unprecedentedly large proportion of $\frac{3}{4}$ ^{ths} of the constituency voted, with the result, [August] Bebel 10,830, [Karl] Mayhoff (Nat. Lib.) 9,930.⁹³ According to the hypothesis which I should provisionally adopt,

stated that Leipzig's National Liberals "would like to see the [Saxon] kingdom turned into a Prussian Pashalick" (The National Archives, FO 215/34). Saxon Interior Minister Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz described the National Liberals as "unpatriotic, insulting to Saxon colours, Byzantine, and anti-national" (Strachey to British FO, May 14, 1875, The National Archives, FO 68/158).

91 Meaning Saxony's equivalent of Ferdinand Lassalle.

92 In the fifth Saxon electoral district, Dresden-Altstadt.

93 In the main election, with a voter turnout rate of 60.1 per cent, the vote totals were: Bebel (SPD), 6940; Mayhoff (NLP), 4375; Hugo Käuffer (DKP), 3967; and Eduard Minckwitz (Progressive), 2023. In the run-off election (72.3 per cent turnout), Bebel won 10,835 votes (51.5 per cent), Mayhoff won 9925 votes (ZSSL 54, Heft 2 [1908],

Table 6. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1874 and 1877

	January 10, 1874			January 10, 1877		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
Saxony						
German Conservatives	18,704	7.2	1	56,677	17.3	6
Free Conservatives	36,545	14.1	5	21,785	6.6	1
National Liberals	69,782	26.9	7	74,427	22.7	7
Progressives	35,985	13.9	4	46,395	14.1	2
Social Democrats	92,180	35.4	6	123,978	37.8	7
Total votes cast / seats	259,592		23	328,088		23
Voter turnout rate (%)	49.5			57.7		
Reich						
German Conservatives	359,959	7.0	22	526,039	9.8	40
Free Conservatives	375,523	7.2	33	426,637	7.9	38
National Liberals	1,542,501	29.7	155	1,469,527	27.2	128
Other Liberals	76,000	1.4	4	180,000	3.3	17
Progressives	447,538	8.6	49	417,824	7.7	35
Social Democrats	351,952	6.8	9	493,288	9.1	12
Total votes cast / seats	5,223,864		397	5,401,021		397
Voter turnout rate (%)	61.3			60.6		

Source: Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 126 (and for explanatory notes).

Note: Some parties have been omitted for the sake of clarity.

the first election did not quite exhaust the Social-Democratic strength, which has now been reinforced by the Conservative Artizans [*sic*], who had previously polled for the Conservative candidate, but, on Particularist grounds, preferred Bebel to the National-Liberal. This loss to the

174). All twenty-three local contests in Saxony in the Reichstag elections of January 1877, with information about the degree of urbanization, turnout rates, etc. in each electoral district, are tabulated in figure S.3.2 in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*. A colour map showing the distribution of winning parties in Saxony is found in map S.3.5 in the same source. A colour map showing results in the entire Reich, originally published in the conservative journal *Dabeim*, is found in map S.3.8 in the same source.

anti-Socialist ticket was, however, as the figures appear to shew, compensated by the increased electoral activity of the National Liberals; I imagine that the [Progressive] Fortschritt party must have voted with even less enthusiasm than before.

As far as is known, Bebel's is the solitary Social-Democratic victory in the second series of [run-off] elections. If so, their original strength of 6 will only have been augmented by 1. It is also to be noted that in 1874 they originally took 7 seats, losing one of them by the accident that Dr. [Johann] Jacoby declined his election in Leipzig county, which district they have now recovered. The moral triumph is greater than the numerical. No more complete victory could have met the successor of Lassalle [i.e., Bebel], than his return in the second capital of Germany, which, though it includes a manufacturing element, is, on the whole, a Residenzstadt of the old type, whose population has an unusually large admixture of persons in independent and affluent circumstances.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/161.

George Strachey to Earl of Derby, No. 28, Dresden (June 15, 1877)

Strachey reports on the progress of the Social Democratic movement since the Gotha party congress in 1875, when the Lassallean (ADAV) and Eisenach (SDAP) wings of Social Democracy united.⁹⁴ This year the united party again held its congress in Gotha.

Two years ago I announced the projected union of the groups into which the Social Democrats of Germany fell after the death of [Ferdinand] Lassalle. The personal antipathies and pretensions that had separated the Bebelianer and the Lassalleaner having mostly subsided, leaving little but mere geographical antagonisms to remove, the fusion was accomplished in the Congress of Gotha, and a programme of party ideals and organization accepted.

⁹⁴ In part to document the growth of the party since its unification in 1875, August Bebel wrote a primer on the Reichstag legislative session of 1874–6. Like its predecessor covering the session of 1871–3, this handbook was intended for use by Social Democratic propagandists and functionaries in their grass-roots agitation during the election campaign. No German political party had produced a similar electioneering tool before that point. See August Bebel, *Die parlamentarische Thätigkeit des Deutschen Reichstags und der Landtage und die Sozial-Demokratie, 1874–1876* (orig. 1876), 2nd rev. ed. (Berlin, 1878).

Many of the persons in Germany best placed for judging held, that the Congress would fail to allay the dissensions, or to revive the activity of an expiring faction, which must gradually collapse under the indifference of the working classes, and the improved efficacy of legal coercion.

What happened was the reverse of this. The compromise of Gotha was followed by a large apparent addition to the Social Democratic strength.⁹⁵ Instead of the 379,000 votes recorded in 1874 the party polled 559,000 at the general election of last winter [January 1877]: their 9 seats in the Reichstag became 12: in Dresden, where Lassalle never counted more than 12 (twelve) sympathizers, [August] Bebel headed the poll with 10,830 votes. This change was probably the mixed effect of improved electoral energy, a fortuitous accession of strength from particularists and disappointed officials, a certain positive spread of Social-Democratic opinion, and the German system of persecution.⁹⁶

The Report to the Congress which sat at Gotha a fortnight ago,⁹⁷ confirmed previous accounts of the good organization and untiring energy of the party. The results obtained seem very large in proportion to the pecuniary resources of German Social-Democracy, which are still extremely limited, the whole amount raised in 9 months for general purposes, and for the Election fund, being only £2,700, or less than a penny a head of the Socialist voting body.

From the debates of the Congress, compared with other evidence, I collect the following facts and inferences.

1. However loudly the "Liberal parties["] may assert the contrary, the force and unity of the Social-Democratic agitation is no longer impeded by personal rivalities [*sic*]. The Saxon programme⁹⁸ has the upper hand: the authority of Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht is now scarcely disputed.

95 Party membership between May 1875 and August 1876 grew by more than 55 per cent, from 24,445 to 38,254 members; the party's finances were relatively healthy – despite what Strachey reports – and its press was thriving. Details in Bebel, *Thätigkeit*; *BAmL*, 559–60; Lidtke, *Outlawed Party*, 54–5.

96 According to the *National-Zeitung* in Berlin (January 21, 1877), the Reichstag election sent "an electric shock through the entire nervous system of our bourgeois existence." Saxony's interior minister, Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz, in conversations with the Prussian and Austrian envoys in Dresden, refused to concede that economic conditions had contributed to a protest vote; instead he blamed Germany's "unlimited rights of association" and the Reichstag's universal manhood suffrage: he claimed the latter had been "conceived in the smoke of victory" (i.e., in autumn 1866). References and other details in Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 125.

97 The Gotha Congress of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAPD) was held on May 27–9, 1877.

98 Meaning the "Eisenach" wing of the Social Democratic movement.

2. The differences visible in the Congress related to subordinate questions, like the patronage to be accorded or refused to special organs, or the propriety of literary contrasts between “men with callous hands” and a so-called “intelligence party” in the Socialist ranks. [Wilhelm] Hasselmann was slightly, not venomously, refractory, on the subject of a fly sheet called the ‘the Red Flag’, of which the Congress desired the eventual Suppression; but his resistance was easily, though not too authoritatively, overcome by Bebel.⁹⁹

3. Bebel and Liebknecht are trying to avoid the character of Hébertists [*sic*]¹⁰⁰ and to impart to the movement as much moderation as is compatible with the maintenance of the enthusiasm necessary to keep it alive. Like some of the subordinate leaders here, and [Léon] Gambetta in France, they have learned the advantages of self-restraint. They renounce the International, or [Mikhail] Bakunin, element in Social Democracy as anarchical, – (a barefaced departure from their old opinions!) – and have urged great caution in the selection of a representative for the approaching International Congress.

4. Without quite accepting the assurance that the Prussian Attorney General¹⁰¹ is the most successful of all the promoters of the cause, I infer that the demand of “a yearly tribute of victims from the reactionary state” actually stimulates the growth of Social-Democracy, and that by imprisoning editors and partizans the German Governments are educating a far more efficient race of agitators than would otherwise arise. The Socialists appear to be absolutely indifferent to the persecutions for press offences of which they are so constantly the objects. They admit that they can practically meet and talk in public as much as they like. With the law of association they are satisfied, except in Prussia, where, however, the prohibition of Corresponding Societies only interferes with the corporate existence of the party, leaving the particular local unions untouched.¹⁰²

5. The distance between Social-Democracy and the “legitimate parties” was much increased by the events of the Paris Commune. Dealings

99 Hasselmann intended to establish *Die Rote Fahne* – originally a publication for the 1877 election campaign – as a weekly journal, which would have been a competitor to the central party organ *Vorwärts*.

100 Hébertists, also known as *Exagérés*, were a radical political group during the French Revolution, named after the journalist Jacques-René Hébert.

101 Hermann Tessenlof (1831–95) was a Prussian jurist and public prosecutor in Magdeburg after 1867 and in Berlin after 1873. Because of the harsh repression he oversaw, he was known as a “Socialist-eater” (*Sozialistenfresser*). He later served (from 1886) as senior prosecutor with the Reich Supreme Court in Leipzig.

102 In Prussia the right of association was regulated by the Association Law of March 11, 1850.

like those of Dr Schweizer [*sic*] with Prince Bismarck are hardly conceivable now.¹⁰³ In the Reichstag the Socialists have tried for “feeling” with the new “Bourgeois Democrats” who, however, have declined parliamentary negotiations.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/161.*

George Strachey to Earl of Derby, No. 30, Dresden (June 29, 1877)

Strachey reports on the trials of Bebel and Liebknecht in Berlin and two editors sentenced for libel in Dresden.

[August] Bebel has been sentenced in Berlin to 9 months imprisonment for defamation of Prince Bismarck, in a pamphlet on the Parliamentary sessions of 1874–7.¹⁰⁴ Bebel had said – that ‘Bismarck talked about God, in order to carry favor with stupid’: that ‘the attitude of the Reichstag towards him was worthy of a Hausknecht (boots)[’]: – that Bismarck had abused his position to secure 1,000,000 Thalers by ‘grounding’.¹⁰⁵ The *Fortschritt* organs are usually very uncivil to the Social-Democrats, but the last sentence on the members for Dresden is described by the ‘*Presse*’¹⁰⁶ as outrageous, and they observe that this brutal continuity of persecution is injuring the oppressor more than the victim, although the pecuniary loss to Bebel, who is a turner, from interruption of his business, must be serious.

The Prussian Attorney General¹⁰⁷ has long held that press offences ought to be arraigned without reference to the recognized principle of the *forum delicti*.¹⁰⁸ He has prosecuted [Wilhelm] Liebknecht for a libel on the Emperor contained in a song called ‘The gun shoots, the sword hacks’ in allusion to Count [Friedrich zu] Eulenburg’s famous threats

103 As president of the ADAV from 1867 to 1871, Johann Baptiste von Schweitzer (1833–75) – a lawyer, journalist, and member of the North German Reichstag – was suspected (rightly) of having received contributions from Bismarck’s “reptile fund,” which was used to pay and bribe journalists friendly to the government.

104 See the title cited above. Bebel was sentenced on June 12, 1877.

105 That is, by participating in the dubious speculative ventures of the “founders’ years” (*Gründerjahre*, 1871–3).

106 *Dresdner Presse*.

107 Hermann Tessenlof.

108 The principle according to which the place of jurisdiction is dependent upon where the crime occurred.



Figure 9. *The Dissatisfied One*, 1877. This painting by Ludwig Knaus (1829–1910) was originally titled *Der Sozialdemokrat* but changed to *Der Unzufriedene*. With his back against the wall, a seemingly disgruntled worker sits alone in his local tavern. The figure’s posture and expression suggest active contemplation, perhaps about how to overcome the discrimination and hardship he faces (the painting was completed before passage of the Anti-Socialist Law in October 1878). All of the newspapers included in the painting represent the SPD: on both the wall and the table, we see the *Berliner freie Presse*, which had been founded recently, in 1876. Also seen are the satirical journal *Kladderadatsch* and a flyer from the Reichstag election campaign of 1877 with the call to arms, “Burghers, Artisans, Workers, to the Polls!”

Source: Wikimedia Commons.

of last year.¹⁰⁹ The Berlin Stadtgericht declared itself incompetent, as the supplement of the Berlin paper¹¹⁰ which contained the song was a sheet printed in Leipzig for local use, and issued, besides, to various Socialist organs. Herr von Tessedorff's attempt to obtain a projudicium¹¹¹ for his proposed innovation was therefore defeated.

My Prussian colleague¹¹² is very punctual in drawing Prince Bismarck's notice to any strong criticisms on him which may be printed here. On his denunciation two Editors¹¹³ have been sentenced for minor libels on the Prince: They will no doubt be far more malicious on the next opportunity.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/161.*

109 Eulenburg's threat in his speech to the Reichstag on January 27, 1876, indeed became famous for the phrase Strachey cites ("*bis die Flinte schießt und der Säbel haut*"). *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Deutschen Reichstags*. 2. Legislatur-Periode. III. Session 1875/76, Bd. 2 (Berlin, 1876), 946. It was parodied in a poem, which was anonymously published in *Die Neue Welt* (The New World), a popular Social Democratic journal and supplement to various socialist papers.

110 *Berliner freie Presse*.

111 Latin: "prejudgment."

112 Count Eberhard zu Solms-Sonnenwalde (1825–1912), Prussian envoy to Saxony 1873–8; later German ambassador to Rome, 1887–93.

113 One of the editors in question was Isidor Landau.

PART II

1878–1889

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George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury,¹ No. 14, Dresden
(May 16, 1878)

Strachey reports on the first assassination attempt on the life of Kaiser Wilhelm I by Max Hödel, a plumber from Leipzig, on May 11, 1878, which was followed by a second attempt by Karl Nobiling on June 2. Strachey offers general comments about the treatment of Social Democrats in Germany and concludes that "the worst impulses of fanaticism" emanate not from the SPD but from "the daily German round of prosecution, punishment, and surveillance."

The news of the attempt on the Emperor's life were received here with suitable demonstrations of the respect and regard entertained for His Majesty by all but extreme Socialists or Particularist partizans.²

Incidents of this lamentable kind must be expected to recur, while the German way of dealing with obnoxious minorities remains what it is. About 3½ years ago I shewed in a comprehensive report,³ based on my own observations, how it was that although the Social-Democrats enjoyed full political rights, no active members of the party could escape the permanent certainties of prosecution and punishment for press misdemeanors and defamation. The sectaries of a destructive creed are nothing if not attacking persons and institutions, and they are easily incriminated under the elastic German law of libel. No political trial has happened in Saxony, for instance, for seven years, but private actions for Beleidigung,⁴ (like the complaints of which Prince Bismarck is said, of course with some exaggeration, to have laid from 7000 to 8000,) are of very frequent occurrence. The infirmities of the national temper make the Germans very intolerant of criticism, so that there is a constant flow of prosecution initiated by sensitive officials, or by the representatives of public bodies, institutions, professions, and departments, (the Army, Clergy, Police, &c &c) which may have been impugned in their corporate character and actions. Then, as the German conception of the duty of the Staatsanwalt⁵ obliges that functionary to interpose, without reference to consideration of general utility, whenever he becomes officially aware that this law has

1 Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil Salisbury, British statesman, MP, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury (1868); secretary of state for foreign affairs (1878–80, 1885–6, 1887–92, 1895–1900); prime minister (1885–6, 1886–92, 1895–1902).

2 Hödel's shots utterly missed the mark and caused no injury. The failed assassination became a pretext for the first draft of the Anti-Socialist Law in May 1878.

3 See Strachey's report dated December 3, 1874.

4 Libel.

5 State attorney.

been broken, his additions to the score of prosecution are by no means small.

The attempt of [Max] Hödel in Berlin has suggested to some of the National-Liberal organs the reiteration of their old hints on the propriety of a legislative crusade against the Socialist propaganda, which, they argue, has no claim to the tolerance proper for the "Legitimate Parties". Responsible politicians will no doubt resist the insertion of the thin end of the wedge of reaction, but the recent augmentations of Social-Democratic strength, indicated, e.g., by [August] Bebel's return to the Reichstag for Dresden,⁶ and the surprising elections in Berlin,⁷ to say nothing of the gradual intrusion of the party into communal offices, have so alarmed the public, that the adoption of some system of Six-Acts⁸ would not, in my opinion, be generally disapproved. Severe repression would without doubt attain some of its' objects, whereas under the above described state of rub and conflict no Social-Democrat was ever intimidated, still less silenced, while the most venomous class enmities and political passions are stored and kept alive. The capacity of Socialist theory for suggesting assassination is sufficiently large, but as a still surer source of the last and worst impulses of fanaticism I should look to the daily German round of prosecution, punishment, and surveillance.

The Social-Democratic management disown Hödel, as an 'Anarchist', or adherent of Bakunin,⁹ and assert that he was formally expelled from their ranks a few days ago; but his work as a subordinate wirepuller of the party in Saxony, gave him daily experience of persecution, so that he was just the man to be full of the rancorous, revengeful, temper, of which the National-Liberal [Ludwig] Bamberger spoke some time ago as making the Empire "the classical land of class hatred".¹⁰

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/162.*

6 See Strachey's report dated January 27, 1877.

7 In the Reichstag elections on January 10, 1877, the SAPD won two Berlin constituencies.

8 Strachey is referring to the repressive Six Articles of June 28, 1832 (German Confederation).

9 Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76) was a Russian revolutionary and the major founder of the social anarchist tradition. His conflict with Marx came to a head at the Hague Congress of the First International in 1872 and sounded its death knell (it was finally dissolved in 1876).

10 Ludwig Bamberger (1823–99) was an 1848er who returned to Germany from exile only in 1866. A banker, he was known for his expertise in financial matters. He coined this phrase in his book *Deutschland und der Sozialismus* (Leipzig, 1878). See Stanley Zucker, *Ludwig Bamberger* (Pittsburgh, 1975). Bamberger was an opponent of Bismarck's protective tariffs, colonies, and state socialism.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 15, Dresden
(May 26, 1878)

After the first assassination attempt on the Kaiser's life, but before the second in early June 1878, Saxon public opinion is against the draconian anti-socialist legislation proposed by Bismarck. Saxony's minister of justice, however, is certain the time has come "for doing something."

The Bill against the Social-Democrats has been almost universally condemned here.¹¹ The most effective criticism I have heard came from the Saxon Minister of Justice,¹² who told me that in his opinion this measure ignored the proper functions and limits of law, confessed the complete bankruptcy of the German system of political and criminal legislation, and claimed for the police powers far in excess of their rightful authority and liable to the gravest risks of abuse.

But, said Herr von Abeken, the time was come for doing something, and the Government of the State where Social Democracy has its principal seat could not refuse to sanction the Bill, which, as they are well aware, proposes too little or too much.

The satisfaction at the rejection of the measure is universal; the belief prevailing, that it would have introduced a kind of state of siege, since the Social-Democrats, besides their special phantastic objects, have 'Aims' of which the moderate parties on both sides desire the attainment.

Saxon constitutional morality and tolerance are doubtless more developed than the equivalent Prussian traditions and habits; Still I do not think that this Government ought to be trusted with the sort of powers demanded by the rejected bill. I often hear in high political places sentiments of malignant Junker reaction; even Free Conservatives like Herr

11 The first draft of the Anti-Socialist Bill sought to endow the Federal Council with the power to suppress socialist publications and organizations, and to empower local police to dissolve socialist meetings and imprison participants. It was rejected by the Reichstag on May 24, 1878.

12 Christian von Abeken (1826–90, ennobled in 1878). In his memoirs, August Bebel described Abeken as "a small, scraggy man with a cold, fanatical face," who reminded him of Torquemada, Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition. Abeken, Bebel wrote, "would have fit well in that age.... An extremely intelligent lawyer with the sharp, dry voice of a bureaucrat, ... he defended the actions of his prosecutors and judges to the hilt. His influence on [Saxony's] judiciary was thereby unhealthy in the extreme, for the justice minister was the inspirer of a considerable proportion of the prosecutions against us." BARS, 6:644–5.

von Nostitz¹³ are constantly backsliding into very questionable regrets and aspirations.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/162.*

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 21, Dresden (July 7, 1878)

Strachey reports on agitated public opinion in Saxony after the second attempt on the Kaiser's life, which injured the monarch seriously and required a long recuperation. A Reichstag election has been called for July 30, and the "parties of order" are jockeying for position, in part to defeat the incumbent representing Dresden, August Bebel.

After the Attempt of Nobling [*sic* for Karl Nobiling], the Conservatives and Liberals of Saxony were profuse in their avowals of readiness to compromise their differences, so that the Social-Democrat candidatures might not be favored by the divisions of the 'legitimate' parties. Special stress was laid on the necessity of a combination likely to secure the election of a moderate for Dresden (Altstadt) in place of [August] Bebel, whose return in 1877 was the result of the feuds of the National-Liberals and the Fortschritt [Progressive] men, and partial Conservative connivance with the Social-Democratic ticket.¹⁴

These dispositions to political union quickly evaporated, and the repulsions, the bitterness, the recriminations, of parties, far from having diminished now exceed the average.

A Fortschritt candidate [August Walter]¹⁵ with marked Federative tendencies has just been put up for Dresden, and National-Liberals, as

13 Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz (1826–1906) was Saxony's minister of the interior from 1866 until his retirement in 1891. He was a frequent interlocutor of George Strachey's. He also served as minister of foreign affairs 1876–82 and as minister of the royal house 1869–71 and 1882–5. He sat in the Saxon *Landtag*'s lower chamber from 1847 to 1866 and briefly in the Reichstag for the 1874–7 legislative session. He professed Free Conservative views and was often sceptical of Bismarck's plans – especially those that threatened Saxony's autonomy – but he willingly led the battle against Social Democracy in Saxony during his long service as interior minister. His brother, Oswald von Nostitz-Wallwitz, served as Saxony's envoy to Prussia from 1873 to 1885. On his nephew, Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz, see section IV.

14 See Strachey's reports of January 24 and January 27, 1878.

15 August Walter (1827–88), a Saxon businessman and founding owner of the lighting company Schilling & Walter in Dresden. He sat in the lower house of the Saxon *Landtag* from 1869 to 1885 for the city of Dresden and in the Reichstag during the

well as Conservatives, have repudiated the cooperation of which there was so much talk.¹⁶ The attempt has been made to bring forward the Bürgermeister of Dresden a National-Liberal of the [Rudolf] Gneist shade, but sufficient support was not forthcoming, and Dr. Stübel's¹⁷ name is, for the present, dropped. Three weeks ago a suitable antagonist to Bebel was believed to have been found in the Ex-Minister Baron [Richard] von Friesen¹⁸ who is a very liberal Conservative, and, what is rare here, a Free Trader. But a declaration issued on his behalf seeming to put excessive accent on the necessity of combating Social-Democracy, and being silent as to other topics, his candidature did not receive sufficient support, especially as some of his old polemical arguments against the National-Liberals had been raked up to prejudice him with that party. The Baron's name was withdrawn, but he is now again to stand for the capital in opposition to the Fortschritt candidate.¹⁹

The prevalent belief is, that under these circumstances Bebel is very likely to carry the election. But since the second attempt on the Emperor the Social-Democrats have kept unusually quiet, and they are showing no sign of their old energy in agitating and canvassing. In Dresden they have not held a single meeting for some weeks, although the Police would not interfere without due cause: I need hardly say that official pressure to influence elections is not tolerated in Saxony.

The electoral prospects of the Provinces²⁰ resemble those of Dresden. There is more than the usual disunion, and a great dearth of suitable candidates. The excitement of last month has died out, and the public is sensible that the dubious repression of Social Democracy is not the chief

legislative sessions of 1877–8 and 1881–4, representing the tenth Saxon electoral district of Döbeln.

16 The Progressives had planned to nominate Wilhelm Schaffrath, their long-time leader in Dresden, but they reversed themselves and nominated Walter, the incumbent in Döbeln.

17 Dr. Paul Alfred Stübel (1827–95), a Dresden lawyer, served as Dresden's lord mayor from 1877 until his death in 1895. In that capacity he sat in the upper chamber of Saxony's *Landtag*. He won election to the Reichstag in October 1881, representing Dresden-Altstadt. He initially joined no party caucus, then affiliated himself to the National Liberals.

18 Richard von Friesen served as Saxon government leader and foreign minister from 1866 to 1876. Progressives did not want to support Friesen because they remembered him as the reactionary minister of the interior in 1848–50 in the government headed by Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust.

19 On election day, the *Dresdner Nachrichten*, July 30, 1878, lamented the lack of anti-socialist unity in Dresden, writing that the Social Democrats had been delighted to watch the parties of order tear each other to pieces.

20 That is, Saxony's other twenty-two electoral districts.

task reserved for the next Reichstag. Saxony apprehends less immediate danger from Bebel's chimaeras than from Prince Bismarck's financial schemes in respect to Tobacco and indirect taxation.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/162.

**Joseph Archer Crowe, Düsseldorf, to Lord Odo Russell,²¹ Berlin
(August 26, 1878)**

Britain's consul-general in Düsseldorf (recently transferred from Leipzig) reports on the general Reichstag election held on July 30, 1878. Bismarck called the election in an attempt to find a new parliamentary majority for the Anti-Socialist Bill that eventually passed in October 1878. Crowe reports that the Social Democratic workers defied threats against them and increased their vote over 1877 in some electoral districts. He also notes that Social Democrats and Catholics ("Petroleum & incense") supported each other in some districts.

I promised to write when I had anything to say, & now that these elections are over and some light has thus been thrown up on the current of opinion I think I can lay my finger on some prominent points of interest. In the first place it is clear that the Rhenish & Westphalian masters & manufacturers who loudly declared that their abhorrence of regicide socialists was so great they [would] dismiss from employment all the socialists they [could] discover amongst their operatives, have not had the courage, or thought it expedient to carry out their avowed purpose. But the steps which they did take were sufficient to intensify the feelings of the operatives [workers] who went to work with a will to elect their own men to the Reichstag. The government was bolder than the masters in so far that they arrested & imprisoned most of the leading socialists, [Wilhelm] Hasselmann, [Johann] Most & others before the election canvass, but this course led to further exasperation & is probably the cause of a large increase of socialist votes (from 35000 in [18]77 to 55000 in [18]78) at Berlin. The Socialists worked hard; but their opponents worked harder still and the result was that at first blush the number of socialist seats was reduced to the ridiculous number of two. The system

21 Odo William Leopold Russell, after 1881 1st Baron Ampthill (1829–84), styled Lord Odo Russell between 1872 and 1881, was a British diplomat and the first British ambassador to Imperial Germany, serving in Berlin. He was known as "Bismarck's favourite Englishman."

of absolute majorities however made a renewal [run-off ballot] of some elections necessary, & the time which elapsed before these took place was short – by defeated parties in active arrangement for coalition. In this way the 60 seats which remained to be distributed fell into the lap of those who had the best alliances. The socialist-democrats & [Catholic] ultramontanes, the socialist-democrats & the Fortschrittler, the ultramontanes & Hanoverians, combined, & in the end 9 socialists were found to have got in. You will see how matters were managed when I tell you that the ultramontanes at the second elections brought in Hasselmann a social democrat at the head of the poll for Elberfeld, the largest manufacturing city in Rhineland, whilst in a similar manner the socialist-democrats secured the election of the ultramontane [Christoph] Moufang at Mayence [Mainz]. At Dresden, [former] Minister [Richard von] Friesen²² was the candidate of the conservatives against [August] Walter a Fortschrittler & the socialist [August] Bebel. None of the candidates obtained an absolute majority. At the second election the Fortschritt men combined with the Socialists & Bebel came in at the head of the poll.²³ [Inserted line:] I could multiply these instances, but I forbear. – It has been said that the Socialists never polled so large a total of votes in Germany as at this election. This is a mistake. They polled more votes at Berlin & Elberfeld. But on the whole their army seems to have been slightly reduced. The number of socialist votes in 1877 was little short of 500000. In 1878 the number was 450,000.²⁴ – “Petroleum & incense”, combined at the second elections gave the socialists victories which they would not otherwise have gained. The two parties which have bettered their fraction [i.e., enlarged their caucus] at these elections are the [Catholic] Centrum & the conservatives. In 1877 the Centrum carried 92 elections, in 1878 they carried 99. In 1877, the conservatives of all shades made up a total of 79. In 1878 they formed a phalanx of 110.²⁵ The gains of the ultramontanes are chiefly in Bavaria, those of the conservatives are in the great landed districts of Prussia (East & West),

22 Saxony's de facto government leader, 1866–76. See the previous note on Friesen.

23 After a bitter ten-day campaign between the main and run-off ballots in Dresden-Altstadt, the mood was tense on August 9, 1878, when the run-off result was announced. Bebel beat Friesen by 11,619 votes to 10,703. Recriminations among the “parties of order” for Bebel's victory came swiftly; but serious disunity was evident among the non-socialist parties in eight of Saxony's twenty-three electoral districts, and in four of these districts a Social Democrat won the run-off ballot.

24 See [table 7](#): the actual SPD totals are 493,288 in January 1877 and 437,158 in July 1878.

25 [Table 7](#) indicates a total of 116 deputies for the German Conservative Party and the Imperial and Free Conservative Party.

Pomerania and Saxony. But the conservative majority is also made up of a few Hanoverian Guelphs, who will vote with the ultramontanes, and a number of Saxon particularists who will not always vote with Prince Bismarck.

The National Liberals lose 30 seats, chiefly in the Prussian provinces. The Fortschrittler [Progressives] dwindled from 35 to 25. The democrats from 16 to 12. In Alsace, the autonomists have made way for Frenchmen & this is peculiarly to be noted at Strasburg.

...

On the whole Prince Bismarck may justly say that the conservatives have gained strength at the expense of the national liberals and democrats. Yet he will have to admit that these gains are not such as to secure to him a working majority. He will find amongst his opponents the Hanoverian, Saxon, & Bavarian conservatives & he will have to fight a larger "Centrum" than the Centrum of 1877. If he hoped by negotiating with Rome to break the opposition of the clergy he made a grievous mistake; & if, as I believe, he comes at last to an understanding with the ultramontanes by an arrangement with Rome, he will find the "Centrum" disbanded not all friendly; for as a party the ultramontanes only hold together on the religious question. In other respects they are men of varying & often quite dissimilar opinions.

...

As I write these lines, I was frightened from my desk by a violent vibration of my room & roar as of thunder. I shook & jumped up and down as if I was rolling along upon the trunnions of an 18 pounder. It was an earthquake, which stopped my clocks at 5 minutes past 9. Everyone in Düsseldorf felt it. People have been thrown down by it & I hear that chimneys and outhouses have toppled over. I don't wish to feel the effects of an earthquake again. It made one of my boys sea-sick.

Source: The National Archives, FO 918/25 (Amphill Papers).

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 25, Dresden (October 8, 1878)

Strachey is dismissive of the Saxon interior minister's confidence in the effectiveness of a parliamentary bill outlawing Social Democracy. The minister is also worried that administration of the new law will encroach on Saxony's federal prerogatives.

Table 7. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1877 and 1878

	January 10, 1877			July 30, 1878		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
Saxony						
German Conservatives	56,677	17.3	6	55,309	16.2	5
Free Conservatives	21,875	6.6	1	43,456	12.7	4
National Liberals	74,427	22.7	7	67,832	19.9	5
Progressives, Radicals	46,395	14.1	2	43,488	12.8	3
Social Democrats	123,978	37.8	7	128,039	37.6	6
Total votes cast / seats	328,088		23	342,687		23
Voter turnout rate (%)	57.1			58.5		
Reich						
German Conservatives	526,039	9.8	40	749,494	13.0	59
Free Conservatives	426,637	7.9	38	785,855	13.6	57
National Liberals	1,469,527	27.2	128	1,330,643	23.1	99
Other Liberals	180,000	3.3	17	222,255	3.9	13
Progressives	417,824	7.7	35	385,084	6.7	26
Social Democrats	493,288	9.1	12	437,158	7.6	9
Total votes cast / seats	5,401,021		397	5,780,993		397
Voter turnout rate (%)	60.6			63.4		

Source: Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 126, 154 (and for explanatory notes).

Note: Some parties have been omitted for the sake of clarity.

Herr [Hermann] von Nostitz [-Wallwitz] informs me that he expects the Social-Democrat Bill to pass in a shape acceptable to the Governments: he does not think that the opposition will be able to carry the 2½ years limiting clause.²⁶

The Saxon Minister [of the Interior] has more faith than any Englishman is likely to have in the possibility of extinguishing feelings and ideas

26 The Anti-Socialist Law ("Law against the Publicly Dangerous Endeavours of Social Democracy") was passed by the Reichstag on October 19, 1878, and the Federal Council on October 21, when it was also signed by Kaiser Wilhelm I; it came into effect on October 22. It banned social democratic and socialist societies, associations, meetings, and publications which aimed at "the overthrow of the existing political or social order." The law, which was originally limited to the duration of two and half years, was extended four times until 1890. See *GHDI*, vol. 4, sec. 7 for the translated text of the law.

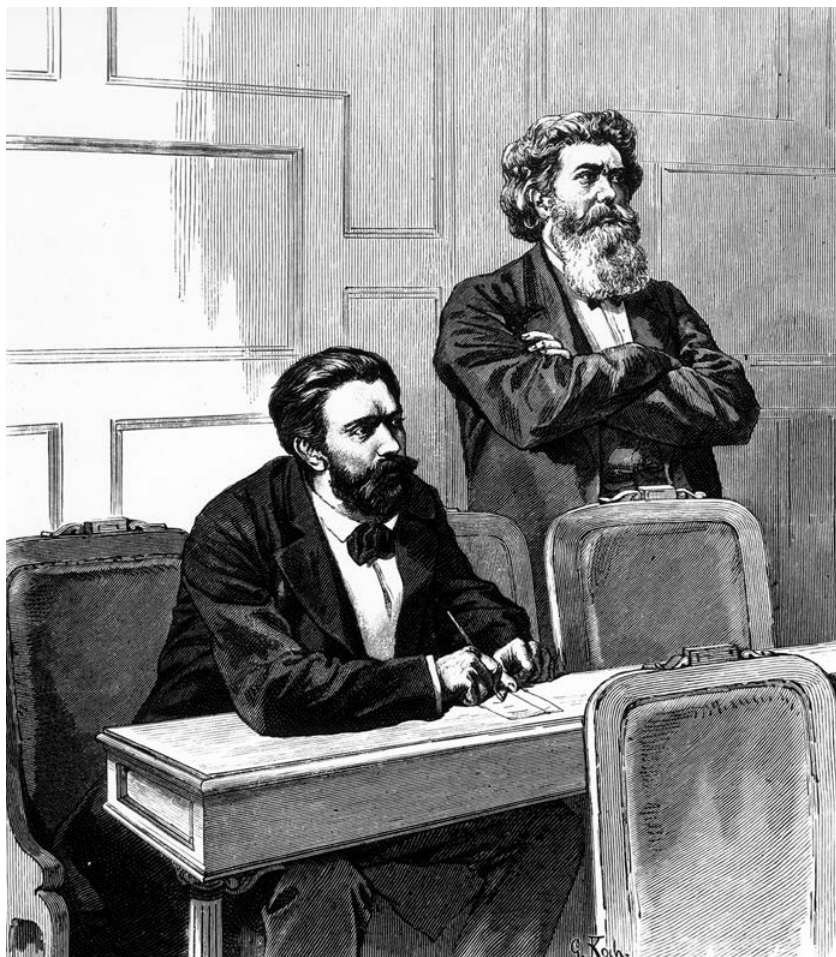


Figure 10. August Bebel and Friedrich Wilhelm Fritzsche, 1878. This etching, after a sketch by Georg Koch (b. 1857), shows Bebel (*left*) and Fritzsche with their backs to the wall, literally and figuratively, in the Reichstag. They are listening to Bismarck defend his anti-socialist legislation during the debates of September 16/17, 1878.

Source: *Daheim* (Leipzig), Jg. 14, Nr. 2, Beilage (October 12, 1878), 33.

by act of Parliament, and he has the usual German instinctive sympathy with repressive laws. But the constitutional aspects of this Bill have pre-occupied him almost more than its' probable efficacy.

This is not surprising, seeing that the sacrifice of sovereignty now to be imposed on the separate states, is thought to be more serious than any previous concession of Particular rights. The proposed measure is specially administrative, and the appointment of the Court of Appeal will give the central power a control over state administration.²⁷ The new encroachment – so it is argued – will be more dangerous in practise, and as a precedent, than the interference of the Empire with the Army, Post Office, Sanitary Police, the Codes, and the like.

Such considerations have had a weight here in deciding a preference for a Court of Appeal exclusively constituted from the Bundesrath²⁸ – that is, of representatives of the Separate States. It is the personal opinion of Herr von Nostitz that such Tribunals ought to include no judicial members. Things, he says, should be called by their right names; and words are misused, and ideas confused, when judges are required to administer a sort of justice which is not according to law.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/162.*

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 27, Dresden (October 17, 1878)

Strachey reports on a belated attempt of German liberals to win the allegiance of workers at the second German Workman's Congress. By this point, the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany had far outstripped the liberal "Hirsch-Duncker" unions in size and influence.

The 2nd "German Workman's Congress" has just been held in Dresden.²⁹

This is the second meeting of the representatives of the Anti-Socialist movement inaugurated two years ago by Dr. Max Hirsch, the author of the non-Socialist Trades Unions of Germany, known as the Hirsch-Duncker

27 The law provided for a committee (*Reichskommission*) that was made up of four members of the Federal Council and five members of the supreme courts of the Reich and the federal states. Complaints could be lodged against the prohibition or surveillance of associations, and the prohibition of publications, but most such complaints were rejected.

28 Federal Council.

29 The congress was held on October 13–14, 1878.

“Gewerkvereine”.³⁰ These societies were founded to complete and control the Loan-Banks, Cooperative Stores, Productive Associations, &c, organized by [Hermann] Schulze-Delitzsch on the anti-Socialist principle of ‘Self-Help’. The apparent philanthropy of Dr. Hirsch and his friends has been called a mask assumed to cover a political design. These ‘Trades-Unions’ have, in fact, been useful in promoting the objects of the liberal bourgeoisie, and in particular, of the Fortschritt [Progressive] party, from which, however they have lately been slipping away.

The anti-Socialist Association of which I am writing, is described by its’ promoters as resting on the above named ‘Trades-Unions’, which do not appear to muster more than 20,000 members. The description of Arbeiter-Congress³¹ was a misnomer: working men were only represented by half a dozen Social-Democrats, who expressed some slight contempt for the proceedings and then retired.

Debates on the means of restoring “harmony between capital and labour” could not fail to turn chiefly on old facts and suggestions. Dr Hirsch reproduced the familiar crambe repetita,³² that the sharpest sword to slay socialism is Culture. Given better educational methods and subjects, inducements to original thought, and solid courses of lectures in Political Economy, and the scales will begin to fall from the workmen’s eyes. Further – the relations of capital and labour must be controlled by a comprehensive system of philanthropic legislation, which has to embrace the entire industrial, social, and physical existence of the workman and his family. The rest is within the competence of ‘Self-Help’.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/162.*

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 28, Dresden (October 27, 1878)

Strachey reports that Saxony’s interior minister dismisses liberal fears that the Anti-Socialist Law might be used to attack them. Strachey concludes that the German populace is willing to tolerate overt repression under the law.

30 The Hirsch-Duncker Unions were founded in 1869. Local English and Scottish trade unions, which were studied by Hirsch on a journey to Britain in 1868, served as models.

31 Workers’ congress.

32 Metaphor for the tiresome repetition of arguments (the phrase *crambe repetita* literally means “warmed up boiled cabbage”); based on a Greek proverb (Juvenal).

Herr [Hermann] von Nostitz [-Wallwitz], who has just returned from Berlin, informs me that the Governments of those German states which have no local experience of Social-Democracy would have preferred to dispense with the new repressive system,³³ and that although the feeling prevailed in official circles that ‘something ought to be done’, faith in the regenerating influence of the bill was by no means universal.

Herr von Nostitz considers that even in their legitimate application the powers now granted to authority ought to be [re]strained. He thinks that no German Government would venture to twist the Bill into a weapon against Catholics, liberals, or radicals. He says, and with justice, that the spirit of malignant reaction has no active influence in Germany, and that no sane politician thinks that the mouths of [Eugen] Richter³⁴ and [Leopold] Sonnemann³⁵ ought to be stopped. As to Prince Bismarck though intolerant of opposition he does not hate progress, and after his declarations, and those of Count Eulenburg,³⁶ it is inconceivable that he should proceed to an “extensive” application of the law.

On the 3rd reading in the Reichstag, 14 of the 23 Saxon votes were given with the majority: The 3 Progressist (Fortschritt) and 4 Social Democrats, went with the majority: the remaining Social Democrats (2) are in prison. This division in the Parliamentary contingent is probably justified by the feeling in the constituencies. It can hardly be said, either in reference to Saxony or Germany, that the repressive bill has been forced upon an unwilling country.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/162.

33 Such states included the Grand Duchy of Baden and possibly other southwestern federal states.

34 Eugen Richter (1838–1906) was a left-liberal journalist and parliamentarian in the Prussian *Landtag* and the Reichstag from the late 1860s onward. He became the leader of the German Progressive Party (Deutsche Fortschrittspartei), after 1884 the German Radical Party (Deutsche Freisinnige Partei), after 1893 the Radical People's Party (Freisinnige Volkspartei). One of Bismarck's harshest critics, he opposed the Anti-Socialist Law of 1878, declaring, “I fear Social-Democracy more under this law than without it.” (Cited in W.H. Dawson, *Bismarck and State Socialism* [London, 1891], 44.) But he was also a virulent opponent of socialism, as shown in his dystopic novel of 1891, *Sozialdemokratische Zukunftsbilder: Frei nach Bebel* (Pictures of the Social Democratic Future: Loosely Following Bebel).

35 Leopold Sonnemann (1831–1909) was a Jewish journalist, publisher, philanthropist, and leading democratic politician. He was publisher and editor of the influential *Frankfurter Zeitung* and a founding member of the Deutsche Volkspartei (German People's Party). He sat in the Reichstag from 1871–77 and 1878–84.

36 Count Botho zu Eulenburg had succeeded his cousin, Count Friedrich zu Eulenburg, when the latter retired as Prussian minister of the interior on March 30, 1878. He served until 1881 (when he was replaced by Robert von Puttkamer), and again in 1892–4.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 31, Dresden
(November 2, 1878)

This report is one among many wherein Strachey reports inconsistent and sometimes contradictory views expressed by Saxony's minister of the interior. Here the minister seems satisfied that Saxon authorities are lax in their persecution of Social Democrats (exactly as Prussians complained they were).

The Saxon authorities are not applying the Law against Social Democracy with any extreme rigour. Some 8 or 9 societies have been forbidden on the grounds of alleged participation in the subversive propaganda. There has been no interference with individuals, and only a single prohibition of printed works.³⁷

The Leipzig 'Vorwärts', the Moniteur of Social-Democracy, has been seized once, but the Kreishauptmann,³⁸ or provincial governor, has not followed the example set in Berlin by suppressing the offending organ, which announced its' transformation into a paper with another name.

These measures have been followed, as the law directs, by the publication of the Motives for each of them. Except in one instance the official reasons for official interference are plausible enough.

Herr [Hermann] von Nostitz [-Wallwitz] told me some time ago that, in his personal opinion, if the "Vorwärts" really turned over a new leaf it ought not to be suppressed just to spite the editor and proprietary for their antecedents. But, he added, the Kreishauptmann in Leipzig will take his own view of such questions, to which the ordinary conceptions of justice and injustice do not apply.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/162.

37 Strachey's report contradicts other sources. In early 1879, Polizei-Direktor Schwauß in Dresden and Polizei-Direktor Rüder in Leipzig boasted to their counterpart in Berlin (Polizei-Präsident Gustav Madai) that Social Democracy and its free trade unions had effectively been shut down in their jurisdictions. Correspondence in Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv Potsdam, Pr. Br. Rep. 30 Berlin C, Polizei-Präsidium, Tit. 94, Nr. 12844 (now in Landesarchiv Berlin). Also see the reports of the Prussian envoy to Saxony, Carl von Dönhoff, in 1880; Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Bonn (now in Berlin), I.A.A.m, Sachsen (Königreich), Nr. 48, vols. 3–4.

38 Count Otto Georg zu Münster, regional governor of Leipzig 1876–87.



Figure 11. “We Hoot at the Law!” 1878. A Social Democratic newspaper, the *Braunschweiger Volksfreund* (Brunswick People’s Friend), produced this “protest pipe” to demonstrate its opposition to the Anti-Socialist Law. (The German title was “*Wir pfeifen auf das Gesetz!*”) It is made of wood, leather, and paper. The barrel of petroleum links this socialist with the alleged arsonists of the Paris Commune of 1871, and his posture suggests what he would like to do to the law. The Anti-Socialist Law (1878–90) forced the *Braunschweiger Volksfreund* and many other Social Democratic newspapers to cease publication.

Source: Author’s collection.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 3, Dresden
(January 22, 1879)

Saxony’s interior minister wishes Bismarck’s attempt to silence Social Democratic critics in the Reichstag could be copied by the Saxon Landtag. Strachey also likens Bismarck’s parliamentary ideals to those of Britain’s “Stuart and Tudor times.”

Herr [Hermann] von Nostitz [-Wallwitz] informs me the Parliamentary ‘Muzzling’ (Maulkorb) Bill was almost as great a surprise to him as it

was to the public.³⁹ Some time ago the Reichskanzler told him he thought that incendiary language, like that of [Wilhelm] Hasselmann in a recent speech,⁴⁰ ought to be checked, and that he was in communication with the German Justice-Department on the subject. Herr von Nostitz had received no other hint that proposals of this kind were forthcoming.

His Excellency always answers questions, as far as possible, in tangents, and when I asked him if he agreed with Prince Bismarck, he replied that he could not understand why expressions in themselves punishable, or actionable, should be privileged when spoken in Parliament. In the Saxon Landtag, e.g., members could libel and slander to their hearts' content, and there was no redress for the sufferers. This Government had not yet considered their course, but would, (he hinted,) probably accept the Bill with modifications.

I said that this was not Prince Bismarck's point. He did not want to protect the public against Parliamentary defamation, but to gag eight individuals.⁴¹ The attempt to found this measure on English precedent was quite unwarranted.... [T]he parliamentary ideals of Prince Bismarck belonged, however, not to the reign of Queen Victoria, but to our Stuart and Tudor times.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/163.*

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 9, Dresden (March 7, 1879)

Once again Strachey reports that Saxony's minister of the interior would happily "muzzle" Social Democratic opponents of the government. Strachey notes that Saxon ministers rarely feel able to disagree with the Prussian government, except when Saxony's federal rights are threatened.

Herr [Hermann] von Nostitz [-Wallwitz] and his colleagues are anticipating the defeat of the 'Muzzle' Bill in the Reichstag today. It is their prudential rule to give a general support to all measures emanating from the Reichskanzler, or from the Prussian Government, which do not distinctly menace Saxon interests. In the present instance, they have adhered to their usual practice, although doubtful as to the ~~wisdom~~ utility of accepting legislative interference with Parliamentary procedure. Herr von

39 The bill was introduced in the Federal Council on January 9, 1879 and passed on February 5. On March 7 the bill was rejected by the Reichstag.

40 This probably refers to Hasselmann's speech against the Anti-Socialist bill in the Reichstag on October 10, 1878.

41 The Social Democratic members of the Reichstag.

Nostitz is a ‘Free-Conservative’ with leanings rather to the right than to the left, and he has a certain instinctive sympathy with the ‘Muzzle’ Bill. But he is less concerned with its’ merits than with the possible consequence of its’ rejection. He imagines that Prince Bismarck will not be sorry to have an excuse for dissolving [parliament] again, and that a second act of resistance by the Reichstag, following on the refusal to permit the prosecution of [Wilhelm] Hasselmann and [Friedrich Wilhelm] Frit[z] sche, would give him as good a pretext as he could desire.

His Excellency believes that the constituencies would respond favourably to a fresh appeal from the Prince, especially as his new financial policy has, on the whole, commanded approval. The ~~different~~ assumed displacement of parties, abstractly considered, would be acceptable to Herr von Nostitz. But beyond the alternatives of Conservative or Liberal there is the question of the ~~eventual~~ formation of a party of ‘Bismarck sans phrase’⁴²....

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/163 (final).

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 30, Dresden (December 20, 1879)

In this long and revealing report, Strachey sketches the reasons for the successful agitation against the Jews in Dresden. The British envoy displays admiration for leading Jewish parliamentarians in Germany and disdains the antisemites’ vulgar and “absurd” attacks upon Jews in general. Strachey also provides a compelling description of Wilhelm Marr’s visit to Dresden and the favourable reaction his public address received from socially prominent burghers in the city – and from the interior minister.

The anti-Jewish agitation,⁴³ which in some parts of Germany has attained considerable proportions, has extended to Dresden.

The new ‘Kulturkampf’ is not undeserving of Your Lordship’s attention. All its’ authors disclaim vulgar, confessional, intolerance. Some of

42 The Imperial and Free Conservative Party was often described as a “Bismarckian party *sans phrase*,” because of its willingness to support Bismarck at every turn. In the late 1870s and 1880s, Bismarck made attempts to form a tighter coalition among the anti-socialist parties, sometimes sending up the trial balloon of merging them into a single governmental party. The German Conservatives and National Liberals resisted such overtures.

43 The literature on antisemitism is too vast to cite here. For an introduction to its emergence before 1890, and for the relevant literature, see Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 186–229.

them affect to call their Propaganda a mere forlorn attempt to initiate a resistance to the 'Conquest of Germany by Jewry'. It is, of course, absurd to describe the German Jews as a dominant race in a country where, however complete their Emancipation may be on paper, they are, as a rule practically shut out from all but the lower ranks of military, civil, and municipal place, and, unless they are Rothschilds or Oppenheims, are exposed, except perhaps in Berlin, to ignominious social treatment.

But though no Jew can rise in a public office, or command an Army Corps or a Regiment, or be Burgomaster of Dresden or Berlin, Germany is exceptionally exposed to Semitic influences. The Jews are powerful because they have been persecuted. The jealousy with which most of the trades, handicrafts, and avocations were guarded against them, drove the Jews into particular branches of industry in which their energy and talents, and inherited commercial knowledge have given them such advantages over all rivals.

Their intellectual greatness is less conspicuous than it was. But if they have lately had no [Ludwig] Börne, [Heinrich] Heine, [Felix] Mendelssohn, or [Giacomo] Meyerbeer, through their [Eduard] Laskers and [Ludwig] Bambergers they have made their mark on the recent German political evolution, and have in some respects, been its' leaders. Many of the principal newspapers are now their property. Their contingent to the editorial and contributing staff of the National-Liberal & semi-official press is almost numerous enough to justify the assertion, lately made, that ten years hence there will not be an uncircumcised journalist in the Empire. In this and other ways the Jews have been able to put forth a strength much in excess of the power naturally available for a minority so numerically weak, and, in spite of the progress of enlightenment, so profoundly obnoxious to popular suspicion and dislike.

The setting in of the Conservative reaction afforded an obvious opportunity for an anti-Semitic crusade. The new propaganda has partly the character of an attack on the National-Liberal system. Clamours against Manchester doctrines, or for a return to the restrictions on labour, or for sharper penal laws, or against Monometallism, Usury, the Stock-Exchange, and the 'Golden International', were suitably pointed by insinuations or tirades against the Jews. A 'Judenhetze'⁴⁴ once started, might reckon on the support of the [Catholic] Ultramontane press, which was glad to make reprisals for the part taken by Jewish journalists against the Catholics in the 'Kulturkampf'.⁴⁵ And high Protestant feeling, aroused

44 Jew-baiting.

45 On Catholic antisemitism, see Olaf Blaschke, *Katholizismus und Antisemitismus im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (Göttingen, 1999). On this phenomenon in local settings, see,

by the virulent Jewish libels or the Lutheran dignitaries, doctrine and practice, could not fail to swell the cry.

The campaign may be said to have opened with a pamphlet of W[ilhelm] Marr⁴⁶ entitled ‘Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum’. The sale of this extremely dull work has been enormous. The author pretends to write as a Pessimist whose only objective is to show in a “document of despair” how completely Germany has been subjugated by Jewry. According to this Jeremiad, the mischief is done. Remedies or palliatives are of no avail. All that remains for the Deutschtum is melancholy acquiescence in the inevitable: the ‘finis Germanae’⁴⁷ has arrived, and the only possible commentary on the catastrophe is ‘Vae victis’.⁴⁸

This poor irony has been almost more successful than the Drapier or Peter Plymley.⁴⁹ It appears to have inspired the Exclusion of Herr Lasker from the Prussian Landtag. The National-Liberal leader lost his election at Breslau owing to an agreement that no votes should be given to a Jew.

About this time an “Anti-Semitic league”⁵⁰ was formed in Berlin, and similar societies have been organized in Breslau, Munich, Nuremberg, Vienna, Pesth, and other German and Hungarian towns. The first Article of the Statutes of this league invites all non-Jewish Germans of whatever confessions, parties, or conditions, – “to oppose by all permissible means the dispossession of the Germanism by Jewry, to drive back the Semites to a position corresponding with their numerical strength, to deliver the Deutschtum from the weight of Jewish influence which oppresses them in social, political and religious respects, and to ensure for the children of the Germans their full right to offices and dignities in the German fatherland.”

inter alia, Helmut Walser Smith, “The Learned and the Popular Discourse of Anti-Semitism in the Catholic Milieu of the Kaiserreich,” *Central European History* 27 (1994): 315–28.

46 Wilhelm Marr (1819–79) was an antisemitic journalist, author, and agitator. In his pamphlet *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism*, discussed by Strachey, he introduced the idea that Germans and Jews were locked in a longstanding conflict, the origins of which he attributed to race. This was a conflict, he claimed, that the Jews were winning. He argued that Jewish emancipation in 1869 and the speculation of the “founders’ years” (1871–3) had allowed the Jews to control German finance and industry. Still among the best biographies is Moshe Zimmermann, *Wilhelm Marr* (Oxford, 1986).

47 Latin: “the end of Germany.”

48 Latin: “woe to the conquered.”

49 Here Strachey refers to Sydney Smith’s *Peter Plymley’s Letters* (1807–8), on Catholic emancipation, and to Jonathan Swift’s *Draper’s Letters* (1724–5), which advocated for Irish independence from England.

50 The Antisemiten-Liga, founded in September 1879.

Article 2 invites subscribers to come forward and “to save their common German fatherland from complete Judification, and to make it a supportable residence for the posterity of the ancient inhabitants of the same.”

I do not know whether the formation of this league preceded or followed the delivery of two lectures (afterwards printed and sold enormously) by the Prussian Court Chaplain [Adolf] Stöcker,⁵¹ an influential patron of the Berlin “Christian-Socialists”. The reverend gentleman is a powerful controversialist, and, unlike Marr, he takes an optimistic view of the situation, which he calls dangerous not desperate. He tries to demonstrate statistically, that the Jews of Berlin form an imperium in imperio,⁵² which, for its’ concentrated strength, wealth, culture, command of the press, and influence on education policy, has no parallel elsewhere, and has become a serious peril to Germany. He proposes an organic reform which shall purify capital by imposing severe restrictions on Usury, Mortgages, Credit, and Stock-Exchange speculation, and elevate work by restoring the Guilds. Helped by such carnal weapons, Germany and Christianity may yet be born again, and break the bondage of Mammon and the Talmud. If Mr. Stöcker’s language against “the school of Satan” is occasionally strong, his justification by the Hebrew principle of “a tooth for a tooth” is complete. He has been personally subjected to gross attacks from Jewish quarters Israelitish insolence, and his extracts from the Berlin ‘Tageblatt’ and [Berliner] ‘Börsen Courier’⁵³ convict his adversaries of controversial indecencies such as religion minorities have seldom ventured to perpetrate.

Of the supplementary literature pro et contra which has appeared in Berlin, Dresden, &c I need not speak. It is described as amounting to “floods”, and must be very remunerative, for Marr, besides accompanying, his first “Trumpet blast” by some new works of the like character, has found it worth while to start a vituperative anti-Jewish monthly called the “German watch”.⁵⁴

51 Adolf Stöcker (1835–1909), Lutheran theologian, court preacher, publicist, and parliamentarian. Stöcker founded the antisemitic Christian Social Workers’ Party (Christlich-Soziale Arbeiterpartei) in Berlin on January 5, 1878 (the term “Workers” was dropped in January 1881 after the party’s appeal to workers was revealed as a sham). Stöcker was a deputy in the lower house of the Prussian *Landtag* 1879–98 and in the Reichstag 1881–93 and 1898–1908. For his role in the history of the German Conservative Party, see James Retallack, *Notables of the Right* (London, 1988). Strachey is referring here to Stöcker’s speeches in meetings of the Christian Social Workers’ Party on September 19 and October 10, 1879.

52 Latin: “a government, power, or sovereignty within a government, power, or sovereignty” or, more commonly, “a state within a state.”

53 Both leading liberal newspapers with national circulation.

54 *Die deutsche Wacht. Monatsschrift für nationale Entwicklung* (Dresden).

The Saxon phase of the Propaganda was not likely to be very acute. While Berlin alone has over 45,000 Jews, and Prussia 350,000, this Kingdom has only 5,000, a number much below the German normal proportion. With one unimportant exception⁵⁵ no Jew is here before the public, and there is no sensible Semitic antagonism against Christian political or commercial interests. But a 'Reform-Union'⁵⁶ lately founded in Dresden for reactionary purposes thought that the persecution or repression of the Hebrews, was an object to which their activity ought to be directed. As this function, however, was not mentioned in the Society's programme, it seemed proper to discharge it in an indirect manner. Accordingly the case was explained to Herr Marr, who at once came to Dresden,⁵⁷ and lectured on his favorite topic under the auspices of the 'Reform Union'. Herr Marr had changed his tactics, for he now described the Semitic infection as curable by some peculiar remedies of his own. For instance – Jews are not to serve in the Army, but to pay a blood tax for which the Judenthum in the aggregate is to be responsible. The 'Mosaic man' to be removed from all official posts of every description. All Bills owing to Jews to be paid ready money, so that dealings with them shall not fall under regular commercial legislation. Jew newspapers not to publish articles on the religious and political affairs of Christians. Jews not to hold land unless for cultivation by Hebrew labourers. Jewish capitalists to undergo forced loans, and Stock-Exchange transactions to be taxed. These ideas may be thought amazing. Perhaps they are less so than the fact that in 1879, in the so-called 'Elbe-Florence', a large and intelligent audience listened to them with patience, and, apparently without dissent. The leading Dresden journal reproduced the lecture with seeming approbation, and again denounced with appropriate insults and invectives Lasker, [Gerson] Bleichröder, the 'Golden International', Monometallism, and Free Trade.

It is characteristic of German statesmanship that [Saxon Interior Minister] Herr von Nostitz-Wallwitz avows a certain sympathy with this movement. He speaks with regret of the good old 'Ghetto', or 'Jewry', principle, maintained here in full vigour until the year 1867 [*sic* in the draft report], which prohibited the residence of Jews in Saxony except in Dresden and Leipzig. This, said the Minister, was an Excellent rule, for it prevented those acquisitions of property by Jewish owners which had been found so mischievous elsewhere.

55 Strachey almost certainly refers here to the Jewish lawyer and Dresden assemblyman Emil Lehmann (1829–98); see Emil Lehmann, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1899).

56 Deutscher Reformverein zu Dresden, founded on November 1, 1879.

57 On November 27, 1879.

One of the last incidents of the question was the publication in an unexpected quarter of an article by the (Saxon) Professor [Heinrich von] Treitschke. In the December [*sic*] number of the “Prussian Review”⁵⁸ this eloquent essayist and historian, while affecting to rebuke as “hateful and brutal”, certain excesses of the anti-Semitic propaganda, argues that it is not altogether indefensible, and practically pronounces in its’ favour. The movement, he says, “runs strong and deep”; it is the “natural reaction of German feeling against a foreign element”, the result of the gulf between western and Semitic life which has subsisted ever since Tacitus spoke of the “odium generis humani”.⁵⁹

Another National-Liberal organ, the Leipzig ‘Im neuen Reich’ has just followed suit in an article⁶⁰ which says that this Propaganda is rapidly growing, that it has extended to America, that it is founded on deep and bitter antipathies of race, and that it suggests an impartial reconsideration, unbiased by narrow Manchester formulas, of the entire modern economic system adopted by the German Liberals, and popularized by their allies the Jews.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/163 (final).*

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 41, Dresden (December 6, 1880)

Strachey returns to the subject of antisemitism and the support that its proponents receive in Saxony. Saxony’s minister of the interior, a staunch Conservative and enemy of Social Democracy, agrees with unwritten Saxon government policy that bars “the seed of Abraham” from almost all civil service (especially judicial) posts in the kingdom. This report

58 Heinrich von Treitschke, “Unsere Aussichten” (Our Prospects), *Preußische Jahrbücher* 44, Heft 5 (November 15, 1879): 572–6. See an excerpt in *GHDI*, vol. 4, sec. 4. Only the last third of the article deals directly with the “Jewish Question.” It was republished in January 1880, along with two later articles, as a separate pamphlet entitled *Ein Wort über unser Judenthum* (A Word about Our Jews). This pamphlet reached a far wider audience than the initial essay: by the end of 1880, it had been printed in three editions, with a fourth following in 1881. Treitschke’s polemic sparked the “Berlin Antisemitism Conflict” (*Berliner Antisemitismusstreit*), which raged for the next two years and produced violent scenes in public meetings in Berlin. The essay included the famous phrase, “The Jews are our misfortune.”

59 Latin: “hatred of the human race.”

60 Anon., “Die Judenantipathie” (The Antipathy to Jews), *Im neuen Reich*, Jg. 9, Bd. 2, Nr. 47 (November 20, 1879): 769–771.

was marked to be forwarded to Prime Minister Gladstone and Queen Victoria.

In my Despatch No. 30, of December 20, 1879, I gave an account of the anti-Semitic agitation in Germany, and shewed how it was that the movement had not extended to this Kingdom [Saxony]. The recrudescence of the question in Prussia has had some slight echo in Leipzig, where the majority of the students at the University appear to sympathize with Professor [Heinrich von] Treitschke and the persecution party.

Herr von Nostitz-Wallwitz betrays, as he did a year ago, a certain approval of the *Hetze*.⁶¹ He does not wish the Jews of Saxony to be baited, for there is no Semitic element to speak of in the local press, and, owing to the prevalence here of the “Ghetto” principle down to 1866, the Jews are neither numerous nor influential. However His Excellency is not favorable to the seed of Abraham and he lately avowed to me that in his capacity of Minister of the Interior he should not think it desirable to name a Jew to one of the higher administrative posts, or even to a superior clerkship.⁶² On my observing that the reserve of the Prussian Government in the recent debate was very like the virtual encouragement of Agrarian murder by the Irish Land-League,⁶³ Herr von Nostitz said that he entirely approved of their negative attitude, because anything like an official rebuke to the Stöckerparty⁶⁴ would have acted as a premium on Jewish insolence which, in Berlin, already passed all bounds. “But then,” said His Excellency “you know I am very reactionary” – a description not really applicable to him, except perhaps in the religious order of ideas.

61 That is, antisemitic agitation.

62 Emil Lehmann in 1882 denounced the policy – endorsed here by Nostitz-Wallwitz – that Jews had to be excluded from positions of authority in Saxony. “Where and how are [Saxon Jews] supposed to have exerted their ‘obtrusive and seditious influence,’” Lehmann asked. “Their political influence is nil. Neither in the [*Landtag*] chambers, nor in the rural county councils, neither in the city council and the city assembly nor in the chamber of commerce, neither as jurors nor as commercial judges are adherents of the Jewish faith active in Saxony.... And in judicial and administrative offices or teaching positions? Where in Saxony is the Jew?” Lehmann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 288–90.

63 The Irish Land League had been formed in October 1879; it worked for the reform of the country’s landlord system under British rule. Its call for a moratorium on rents and the increasingly violent rhetoric of its representative in the House of Commons, Charles Parnell, led to its suppression in October 1881.

64 The Christian Social Workers’ Party, led by Court Preacher Adolf Stöcker; see the earlier note.

The tone of the public journals is very similar. The semi-official [Dresdner] 'Journal' has treated the 'Hetze' historically, in a dry, objective tone, which, under the circumstances of the case, is equivalent to sympathy. The anti-Semitic sentiments of the "Dresdner Nachrichten"⁶⁵ are more openly avowed, but the hostility of that paper is a mere commercial and protectionist hatred, directed against the "Golden International", which it explains, makes money dear, lends at usurious rates, and impoverishes Germany by excessive importations of foreign goods.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/164.⁶⁶

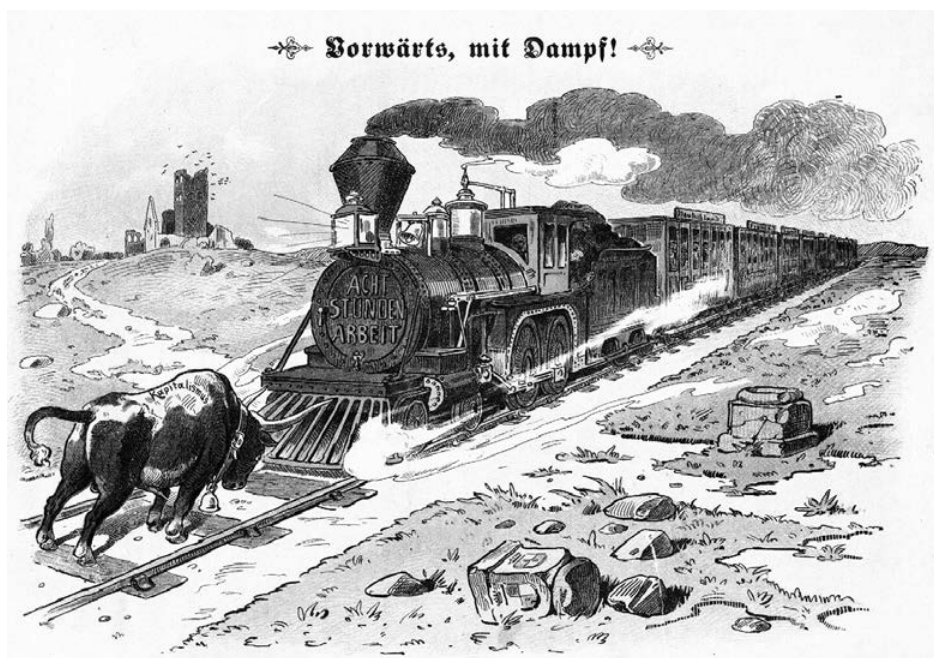


Figure 12. "Full Steam Ahead!" 1892. This cartoon from the Social Democratic journal *Der Wahre Jacob* illustrates the party's confidence that organized socialism – linked here with a powerful, mechanized future – will eventually push aside bullish capitalists who have been unwilling to concede the eight-hour workday (inscribed on the front of the locomotive).

Source: "Vorwärts, mit Dampf!" *Der Wahre Jacob* (Stuttgart), Jg. 9, Nr. 150 (April 23, 1892): 1228 / Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.

⁶⁵ The leading newspaper of Saxon Conservatives.

⁶⁶ Transcript provided to the author by Markus Mößlang.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 8, Dresden (February 9, 1881)

Strachey discusses Bismarck's workers' insurance scheme with Saxon Minister of the Interior Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz. Strachey's sympathy lies with German workers, and even Nostitz agrees that "something must be done." In his opinion, "remedial as well as repressive legislation was wanted." But Nostitz is worried, as usual, about the implications of Reich legislation intruding on the constitutional rights of Germany's federal states.

The German Operatives Insurance scheme has been, on the whole, favorably received here, for the reason given by Herr von Nostitz for his own approval, —namely that ~~something must be done to shew that the state is not indifferent to the condition of~~ it is a practical attempt to "do something" for the working class.⁶⁷

I recently observed to His Excellency that the workman would not be able to pay his share of the Premium unless his wages, and therefore the cost of labour, were proportionally increased. And that similarly the Employer, for his part of the Premium, would suffer an equivalent deduction from profits. Evidently then the price of commodities must be raised, or the public taxed for the difference.

Herr von Nostitz replied that he could not altogether deny this, but that "something must be done": remedial as well as repressive legislation was wanted. The objections to the scheme were obvious. Unquestionably it had a Socialistic basis, especially in the provision that the workmen with wages under 750 mark (£38) a year should pay nothing towards the Premium, the whole Insurance being thrown on the Employer and the poor rates. Then he disapproved of the Insurance being organized by the Empire: such arrangements were properly of local not Imperial competence.

The last named point has been discussed in the official "Journal"⁶⁸ which has argued with some cogency that Federal Insurance would be unconstitutional. The attributes of the Empire do not include Insurance, and the Constitution does not allow Imperial interference with Poor relief, the control of which, as regards the new purposes of the project, would now be centralized.

67 The newly constituted National Economic Council (*Volkswirtschaftsrat*) agreed on February 2, 1881, to the provision for the accident insurance bill in question. The bill was passed by the Federal Council on March 8, 1881; only much later, in July 1884, did the Reichstag follow suit.

68 *Dresdner Journal*, February 7, 1881.

This Particularist argument is just, but the adjective “unconstitutional” conveys no necessary reproach, for the German Constitution expressly provides that ‘unconstitutional’ measures may, under certain restrictions, become law. There is more force in the objection that Poor Relief, of whatever kind, cannot be properly managed, and becomes, in fact, mischievous, unless cases are individualized, which can be effected by separate domestic management, whereas an Imperial Board sitting in Berlin would necessarily act in entire ignorance of local relations, things and persons. The administration would be cumbersome, and slow, and involve the creation of a large official staff, which would be an extravagant proceeding when the work might be done without appreciable cost by existing local authorities.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/165 (final).*

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 21, Dresden (April 9, 1881)

Interior Minister von Nostitz is angry that the Prussians have blindsided him as part of their pressure on Saxony to impose the “Minor State of Siege” on Leipzig and its environs. In a surprisingly candid conversation with Strachey – which the envoy decides to soften in the fair copy of his report to London – Nostitz uses bitter sarcasm to belittle the Prussians’ exaggerated fear of Social Democracy.

With reference to the recent declaration in the Reichstag by the Prussian Minister of the Interior, that it might be necessary for the Government of Saxony to ask leave of the Bundesrath⁶⁹ to apply the ‘lesser’ state of siege⁷⁰ to Leipzig, ~~the ‘[Dresdner] Journal’ lately declared that no comment whatever had passed between Berlin and Dresden on the subject~~ Herr [Hermann] von Nostitz [-Wallwitz] informs me that Herr [Robert] von Puttkamer’s statement was as ~~amazing~~ surprising to him as it was

69 Federal Council.

70 The “Minor State of Siege” (*Kleiner Belagerungszustand*), included in §28 of the Anti-Socialist Law, permitted individuals suspected of Social Democratic activity to be expelled from their place of residence. It had already been imposed on Berlin (October 28, 1878) almost immediately after passage of the Anti-Socialist Bill, resulting in 67 expulsions. It was next imposed on Hamburg and Altona (October 27, 1880), resulting in 127 expulsions (including thirty-two Social Democrats who had had to leave Berlin). By spring 1881, the Prussians wanted §28 imposed on Leipzig. One important motive was to dampen Social Democratic election campaigning for *Landtag* elections that summer and Reichstag elections in October 1881. For background to these reports, see Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 140–5. An English translation of §28 can be found at *GHD*, vol. 4, sec. 5.

to the public, and that he had immediately asked for explanations at Berlin.⁷¹

If the Prussian Government, continued His Excellency, ~~had their own means of~~ knew of dangers hatching in Leipzig, they were better informed than he was: [August] Bebel and nine or ten other socialist leaders were settled there, and the old, chronic, evil was not, of course, eradicated, but nothing new and acute ~~had happened~~ was happening. These people must live somewhere, and they were not doing any particular extraordinary harm where they were [*sic*], so as to justify the discovery that their presence constituted ~~any actual~~ a danger. If it did, the ‘lesser’ state of siege would be a useless remedy. He should then have the right to order Bebel and his associates to quit Leipzig, whereupon they would go somewhere else. On the whole, said Herr von Nostitz, I think we may leave our socialists alone for the present. But this, he added ~~discourteously~~ sarcastically, is subject to the superior lights which they may have in Berlin.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/165 (final).*

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 30, Dresden (July 2, 1881)

Strachey continues to be amazed by the Saxon interior minister's vacillating opinions about Social Democracy and the personal hardships endured by its leader, August Bebel. This report was written only a few days after Bebel and other Social Democrats had been expelled from Leipzig under Article 28 of the Anti-Socialist Law. In April 1881 Nostitz had been outraged by the pressure applied by Prussia to impose the “Minor State of Siege” on Leipzig. Now, in July, he claims the act was justified.

In continuation of my previous Despatch I have the honour to report, that when Herr von Nostitz spoke of the incident in Leipzig, I abstained from reminding him of his language to me three months ago (quoted in my No. 21 of April 9) to the effect that the ‘lesser state of siege’ was a useless measure, & that nothing fresh had been done by the S.D.'s, who must live somewhere, and might as well be in Leipzig as in any other place.

~~The minister now said~~ that Herr von Nostitz informed me that there had of late been a considerable recrudescence of Social-Democratic activity in Leipzig. The local wire pullers of the party, reinforced by agitators who had been expelled from Berlin and Hamburg, were vigorously pushing their propaganda: they were holding meetings, and communicating with “the Nihilists”.

71 In a plenary session of the Reichstag, and without informing Nostitz or Saxony's envoy to Prussia beforehand, Puttkamer advised imposing the state of siege on Leipzig in response to incidents that were ‘naturally unknown’ to the Saxon government.

His Excellency's statement of the conflict of the Bebelists with the Russian, or European, party of annihilation, was very shadowy. Now that the Socialists have been driven, so to speak, underground, very little is known of their proceedings. I lately conversed with the official⁷² specially charged with the execution of the [Anti-] Social-Democrat Law, and found that he could throw no real light on the subject.

On my remarking to Herr von Nostitz that the first victim of the new rule would no doubt be [August] Bebel, and asking how the [Reichstag] member for Dresden was to live if his turner's shop were closed at a day's notice, His Excellency treated this as a matter of mere detail. He made an observation in the style of Mazarin's "je n'en vois pas la nécessité",⁷³ that Bebel could easily find a man of straw to carry on his business. I subsequently asked for the exact statistics of the expulsions from Leipzig, and of the arrests in Dresden (magnified by the 'Daily News' into the application here of the state of siege[]).⁷⁴ The Director of the Foreign Office gave the requisite details in a letter which I have the honor to enclose, as his *ipsisima verba*⁷⁵ will be more interesting than my paraphrase would be.⁷⁶

According to M. de Watzdorff's report, which agrees with the accounts in the press, there have been thirty-three notices to quit Leipzig for the space of a year, and ten persons have been apprehended in Dresden.⁷⁷

These last arrests have, I believe, principally arisen from breaches, actual or imputed, of the Social-Democrat Act, in respect to money collections for the furtherance of Socialist objects.⁷⁸ Such cases occur from time to time, and they attract no attention.

72 Werner von Watzdorf, a senior councillor in the Saxon foreign ministry and plenipotentiary to the Bundesrat.

73 French: "I don't see the necessity of it" (quotation attributed to the Comte d'Argenson, not Cardinal Mazarin).

74 Strachey is referring to the *Daily News* of June 29, 1881. The "Minor State of Siege" had been imposed on Leipzig by the Federal Council – at the request of Saxony – on June 27 (with effect from June 29). Named Social Democrats were given seventy-two hours to leave the city. On expulsions from Leipzig and other regions under §28, see figure S.4.2 in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*. Leipzig and its environs experienced 158 expulsions in all. For the occupations of Social Democrats expelled from Leipzig and other parts of the Reich, see figure S.4.3 in the same volume.

75 Latin: "the very words."

76 Enclosure: Werner von Watzdorf to Strachey, July 2, 1881 (not available to the author).

77 The key source on the "Minor State of Siege" and its provisions for banning Social Democrats from their place of residence is Heinzpeter Thümmel, *Sozialistengesetz* §28 (Vaduz, 1979). A tabulation of Social Democratic associations and literature banned under the Anti-Socialist Law, as well as appeals to the *Reichs-Kommission* for redress, can be found in figure S.4.1 in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*.

78 Between 1878 and 1890, Social Democrats regularly tried to raise funds to support the wives and children of members who had been expelled from their place of residence. Whether such solicitation was illegal under the Anti-Socialist Law was a grey area of jurisprudence.



Figure 13. “Leipzig’s Little State of Siege,” 1881. *Caption:* “Choir of expellees. I praise my Leipzig! It’s just a Little – Berlin.” Here we see leading Social Democrats being expelled from Leipzig after imposition of the “Minor State of Siege” on the city and its immediate environs* on June 29, 1881. In the first row are Wilhelm Hasenclever (*with suitcase*), Wilhelm Liebknecht, and August Bebel.** Part of the wordplay involves Leipzig’s reputation as “Little Paris” (*Klein-Paris*), also because Berlin was the first city on which the “Minor State of Siege” was imposed.

Source: “Leipziger Belagerungszuständchen,” unidentified cartoon in Wolfgang Schröder, *Blickpunkt Borsdorf: August Bebels und Wilhelm Liebknechts Asyl 1881–1884* (Borsdorf, 2004), 16.

* The city of Leipzig and the district (*Amtshauptmannschaft*) of Leipzig. Eventually Bebel and Liebknecht took up residence just outside that district, in Borsdorf, which conveniently was on the direct railway line that connected Leipzig, Würzen, Riesa, and Dresden, allowing them to travel to the rest of Saxony and beyond.

** On July 2, while Saxon police waited in vain at Leipzig’s train station to put down any possible demonstration of support for the expellees, Bebel and Liebknecht simply walked eastward from the city until, two hours later, they reached Borsdorf. In this “first batch” of expellees were thirty-three Social Democrats, including thirty fathers with a total of fifty-three children.

I have not yet been able to learn if the adoption of the “little state of siege” in Leipzig was spontaneously proposed in the Bundesrath by the Saxon Government, or if it was suggested by Prince Bismarck. Without enquiring into the policy of the measure, I would remark that the conduct of this Government is fully covered by the letters and spirit of the Imperial [Anti-Socialist] Act of 1878.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/165 (final).*

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 39, Dresden (October 26, 1881)

Agitation among all parties has heated up on the eve of the general Reichstag election in late October 1881. Strachey is dismissive of popular opinion in Saxony because it continues to support Bismarck's campaign against Social Democracy and its leader, which in the last three years has failed to hamstring the party or drive its deputies from the Reichstag. Again expressing his admiration for August Bebel – as a man of honour and as a representative of a heretical ideology – Strachey writes, “Very few Saxons are politically educated enough to see that if a Bebel exists he ought to be in Parliament.” He astutely describes the candidates competing to represent the Saxon capital in the Berlin parliament and the overheated rhetoric they are using to explain their political programs. However, Strachey gives almost no attention to local contests in Saxony's other twenty-two Reichstag electoral districts. (An exception is found in his report of November 1, 1884). For most Reichstag election campaigns, Strachey surveyed the array of political forces almost exclusively in Saxony's fifth electoral district of Dresden-Altstadt.⁷⁹ Even though it was symbolically important for Social Democrats and their enemies alike, and thereby generated much discussion in the circles Strachey communicated with, London's Foreign Office was left with bare statistics about political conflict in the rest of the kingdom.

The General Election for the Fifth German Parliament takes place on the 28th Instant.⁸⁰ The decomposition of the old parties, and the formation of new, has now reached such lengths, that the Saxon voter is now being canvassed by the representatives of no less than 7 separate political programmes. On Friday next the constituencies of the 23 Electoral Circles [districts] of the Kingdom will be polling for Conservatives, National-Liberals, Secessionists, Fortschrittspartei or Progressists, Democrats, Social-Democrats, and Reformers or Anti-Semites.

79 A spotlight is cast on the 1881 Reichstag election in Dresden-Altstadt in Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 160–6.

80 The Reichstag elections were held on Thursday, October 27, 1881.

Particular interest will attach to the contest for Dresden (old-town). Up to 1877 this city was represented by a Progressist,⁸¹ who, in that year lost his seat to [August] Bebel. In 1878 the Socialist leader was again returned by a considerable majority, although his opponent was the Ex-Minister Herr [Richard] von Friesen, a popular personage in the capital, of liberal-conservative opinions.

Under the [Anti-Socialist] law of 1878, as interpreted here, meetings may not be held, or addresses published, or bills posted, or any visible signs of electioneering activity displayed, in favor of Social-Democrat candidates. But a proscribed party with the vitality of theirs soon learns the arts of subterraneous agitation, and in the twelve Circles [electoral districts] which the Social Democrats contest [in Saxony] they are carrying on an active propaganda by personal canvass, the distribution of appeals, and so forth. In Dresden their manifestoes have been pushed in the night under doors, fixed to bell-handles, and otherwise secretly circulated. A few days ago forms were seized at a printer's in Pirna which contained the type of an address from Bebel of which 15,000 copies had already been struck off.

Very few Saxons are politically educated enough to see that if a Bebel exists he ought to be in Parliament. It is intelligible that there should be an anxiety to deprive the party of the prestige attaching to the occupation of the seat for the capital.⁸² The Conservatives and National-Liberals have now jointly set up against Bebel the first Burgomaster of Dresden, Dr [Alfred] Stübel.⁸³ ~~This gentleman enjoys much popularity & distinction; his talents include a Southern charm of manner rarely found in Saxony.~~ Although I am well acquainted with the city magistrate, I never could discover his political opinions, and from his address the constituency might infer that he had none. However the candidate of a Coalition must necessarily use elastic phrases, and leave some burning questions untouched. Dr Stübels [*sic*] programme is so Conservative in substance, and so Liberal in its' reserves, that he faces both ways at once. He speaks of the situation of the artizan [worker] as deplorable, and hopes that means may be found to improve it by the cooperative organization of labour: he will support plans for the improvement of protection of work, if they do not infringe on the liberty of trade and business. If workmen are to be insured against accidents the establishment of a public insurance system is unavoidable: insurance for old age is a pious object, but its' realisation may be very difficult. The schemes for an Imperial Railway System,

81 Eduard Minckwitz.

82 Many Conservatives and National Liberals felt ashamed that Bebel had been elected for Dresden-Altstadt, not only in 1877 but in the elections of July 1878, when anti-socialist sentiment was at its height.

83 See the previous note on Stübel.

and for a Tobacco Monopoly, are in themselves utterly objectionable: but these, and other eventual projects of the Government of the Empire must be judged on their motives and merits. A state system of German colonization is an urgent necessity. The re-adoption of Protective duties for the half developed industry of Germany is absolutely indispensable.⁸⁴

This trimming document is not calculated to excite electoral enthusiasm, but the appropriate declamation, and abuse of adversaries, is supplied in the address of Dr Stübel's [election] Committee.

An average English Liberal, or Conservative, would be disposed to vote for Dr. [Franz] Wigard,⁸⁵ the candidate of the 'Fortschritt', or Progressist, party. His language is categorical, almost drastic. He advocates a responsible Ministry for the Empire: economy in military expenditure, and two years service: reduction of taxation: abolition of taxes on coffee, petroleum &c.: effective Protective duties: maintenance of universal suffrage, and of the guaranteed rights of the separate States. On the other hand, Dr. Wigard exclaims – no new indirect taxes! no tobacco monopoly! no system of Imperial Railways! no workman's State Insurance, or compulsory Guilds! no ~~exceptional~~ laws of Public Safety! No Chancellor dictatorship, and no restrictions on the rights of the people or parliament!

The third candidate for Dresden is the Royal Prussian Chaplain, [Adolf] Stöcker⁸⁶ whose participation in the Anti-Semitic crusade is so notorious. His supporters are the 'Christian-Socialists', and 'Reformers' – the Reform in view being chiefly the persecution of Jews, the special taxation of the so-called 'International' capitalists, the subversion of religious tolerance, and the intrusion of clerical control in education, politics, and morals, with the restoration of various medieval ideals. There is ~~ignorance &~~ bigotry enough in Dresden to ensure Dr. Stöcker a certain support, but the votes given him would otherwise fall to Dr. Stübel.

In these circumstances it is probable that no 'absolute' majority will be attained on Friday, and that a casting [run-off] election will be requisite between the sitting member Bebel, and either Dr. Wigard, or Dr. Stübel, the nominee of the Conservative-National Liberal coalition.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/165 (final).*

84 Underscored in Strachey's draft report.

85 Franz Wigard (1807–85), a medical doctor and professor in Dresden, a '48er, and long-time leader of Saxon Progressives. Wigard held the seat of Dresden-Altstadt in the Reichstag from 1867 to 1874 and was a deputy in the lower chamber of Saxony's *Landtag* 1849–50, 1869–75. He also sat in Dresden's municipal assembly between 1849 and 1882 (with interruptions).

86 See the previous note on Stöcker.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 40, Dresden (October 28, 1881)

The thirty-six hours before and after the Reichstag election in Dresden-Altstadt on October 27 produced high political drama. Bebel announced that he would distribute pre-printed election ballots at Max Kayser's Cigar Shop the night before the poll. Saxon police closed the shop at 10:15 p.m. to limit the damage, but the next morning it was packed with Social Democratic voters who wanted "to collect a ballot along with their Sunday cigar." On election evening, a near-riot erupted in Dresden's Old Market Square as the crowd waited for the election result to be announced.⁸⁷ Police fired blank rounds at the crowd, a nearby military unit was called in, and dozens of Dresden workers awoke the next morning in hospital or in jail. As Strachey reports on October 28, none of the candidates won a majority, so the "parties of order" will have the opportunity to unite against August Bebel in the second round of balloting. Oddly, Strachey makes no reference to the bloody tumult the night before. By contrast, the Prussian envoy expressed worry about election violence in the future, adding a comment that echoed Strachey's own estimation of Dresdeners' usual political apathy.⁸⁸

[August] Bebel was at the head of the poll yesterday with 9,000 votes: the Conservative-National Liberal received 8,000 votes: the Progressist 4,000: the Anti-Semite 2,000. No candidate having scored an absolute majority of the aggregate vote, another poll will be requisite.⁸⁹

If the Progressists come to the assistance of Dr. [Alfred] Stübel in the casting [run-off] election, Bebel will presumably be defeated. But such coalitions often prove a broken reed, and the Socialists sometimes reserve their full force for the final poll.

⁸⁷ The scene is described in Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 1–2.

⁸⁸ "Yesterday's disturbance," wrote Prussian envoy Carl von Dönhoff, "has also shown how deeply Dresden's population – which usually reacts to all other sorts of provocation with exemplary calm and reverence for authority – must have been stirred up by the socialists to let itself be carried away to such acts of disorderliness." Dönhoff to Bismarck, October 28, 1881, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Bonn (now Berlin), I.a.a.b Deutschland, Nr. 102, vol. 5.

⁸⁹ The exact figures in the main ballot were: Bebel (SPD): 9,079 votes (38.8 per cent); Stübel (Cons.-NLP): 8,037 (34.4 per cent); Wigard (Progressive): 4,069 (17.4 per cent); Stöcker (Conservative/antisemite): 2,076 (8.9 per cent). In the run-off, Stübel with 14,139 votes (56.0 per cent) defeated Bebel, who garnered 10,827 votes. Voter turnout increased from 76.3 to 82.4 per cent between the main and run-off ballots – in both cases much higher than average turnout in Saxony or the Reich (see [table 8](#)). On the Dresden voting, see also [figure S.4.5](#) in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*.

... [T]here has been a distribution of the strength of the Nat. Libs. & Progressists not having kept pace with the growth of the constituency ... [T]he National-Liberals [are] no longer forming an effective party, & the Conservatives, who seven years ago were nowhere, [are] now a powerful electoral faction. The support given to Bebel has been rather less than in 1878, but the voters in favour of So[cial]-Dem[ocra]cy are now no less than seven times as numerous as they were in 1871.

Judging from the imperfect accounts available for the rest of the Kingdom, the Social-Democrats have been comparatively unsuccessful in their former strongholds. On the other hand the Progressists have won several seats, so that they may possibly be restored to the strength with which they went to the 1st German Parliament [1871]. Opinions formed today must be provisional, but I should say that the Saxon Elections look, at present like a vote of no-confidence in Prince Bismarck. Indications of this are – the recovery of his grand enemy the ‘Fortschritt’ Party; the denunciations by the Conservatives of the Tobacco Monopoly and Railway Scheme; and the small favor shewn to his plans of Social reform.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/165 (final).

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 44, Dresden (November 10, 1881)

Strachey paid far less attention to debates in the Saxon Landtag than to elections to the Reichstag in Berlin. But this report is an exception, because the three Social Democrats in the Landtag are raising a storm of protest against the intimidation their party was subjected to in the recent Reichstag election campaign. A speakers' duel erupts between August Bebel and Saxony's minister of the interior, in which the latter raises stereotypical middle-class fears about the triumph of socialism and what might follow.

The [Saxon] Landtag, which meets in biennial session, is now sitting.

The first political business brought before the 2nd Chamber was an interpellation by the three Social-Democratic members [August] Bebel, [Wilhelm] Liebknecht, and [Ludwig] Puttrich,⁹⁰ respecting the motives which induced the Government to apply the ‘lesser’ state of siege to Leipzig in June last.

90 Ludwig Emil Puttrich (1824–1908) was a lawyer in Leipzig who had been active in the democratic movement of 1848/9. He represented a rural district in the Saxon Landtag from 1879 to 1885.



Figure 14. “Election Agitators,” 1884. Social Democracy’s self-representation and its analysis in history books tend to suggest, not incorrectly, that it was a mainly urban phenomenon, and its appeal to workers in the countryside was limited. The fact that this image shows *liberal* agitators lobbying for the votes of such workers is important, although only the accompanying text makes that clear. These manual labourers seem hardly capable of forming their own political opinions (as noted in Andreas Biefang, *Die andere Seite der Macht* [Düsseldorf, 2009], 117). Even universal manhood suffrage appears suspect, as we observe a partly obscured man on the back of the electioneer’s wagon dispensing liquor to the workers from a carafe – in effect, buying their votes. These themes might well have appealed to middle-class readers of the conservative journal *Die Gartenlaube* just before the Reichstag elections of October 27, 1884.

Source: “Wahlagitatoren” (detail), engraving after an oil painting by Heinrich Schaumann, *Die Gartenlaube. Illustriertes Familienblatt* (Leipzig), Jg. 1884, Heft 39, p. 641 / Wikisource.

Bebel argued, – that if the Government had believed that public order and safety were menaced, they would not have been satisfied with the removal of the persons incriminated, but would have exercised the full power available under the German law against Social-Democracy, besides prosecuting the alleged offenders for breach of the Saxon law against corresponding-Societies. The assumed secret meetings of his party had never taken place: there had been no communication with Russian

Table 8. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, October 27, 1881

	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
Saxony			
German Conservatives	75,523	24.3	5
Free Conservatives	33,403	10.7	4
National Liberals	43,420	14.0	5
Other Liberals	14,772	4.5	1
Progressives, Radicals	55,770	17.9	4
Social Democrats	87,786	28.2	4
Total votes cast	313,345		23
Voter turnout rate (%)	52.4		
Reich			
German Conservatives	830,807	16.3	50
Free Conservatives	379,293	7.5	28
National Liberals	642,718	12.6	47
Other Liberals	533,203	10.5	55
Progressives	649,286	12.7	60
Social Democrats	311,961	6.1	12
Total votes cast	5,118,332		397
Voter turnout rate (%)	56.3		

Source: Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 154 (and for explanatory notes).

Note: Some parties have been omitted for the sake of clarity.

Nihilists; and the collections of money were for the benefit of partizans expelled from the Empire. Of the 70 persons ordered to quit Leipzig 59 were heads of families, many of whom had little or nothing to do with the Social-Democratic movement.⁹¹ The authorities had in numerous cases behaved with gross harshness, and had abused their powers: for instance they had taken down minute descriptions of the persons expelled in the way usual with common criminals. Then his wife [Julie Bebel], and Frau [Natalie] Liebknecht, had been refused leave to make a collection for the families injured.

All these proceedings [continued Bebel] had nothing to do with fears for order and safety, which no one was threatening. Their real origin must be sought in the anxiety of the Saxon Government to influence the elections by getting rid of a number of obnoxious persons supposed to be engaged in the Social-Democratic propaganda. Was it surprising if such facts excited in wide circles bitter and revengeful feelings, and the

91 Bebel refers to persons expelled from Leipzig and its environs under §28 of the Anti-Socialist Law, the "Minor State of Siege." See earlier explanatory notes.

desire to upset the existing system, on which the inevitable consequences would, in due course, assuredly fall.⁹²

Herr [Hermann] von Nostitz [-Wallwitz], as Minister of the Interior, said he was ready to reply, although he might decline on the ground of non-competence, as the Reichstag, not the Landtag, was the proper forum for questions relative to the execution of an Imperial law. He proceeded to shew from Bebel's parliamentary speeches, and from the proceedings of the Congress of Wyden, (in 1880) that the programme of the Party was the subversion of monarchy, of individual property, and of religion, and the organization of communism, and atheism. Such was their activity, that in Saxony the newspapers suppressed under the law of 1878 had been largely replaced by pamphlets and fly-sheets; while in lieu of the prohibited Societies there had been founded a number of Clubs with names indicating harmless social purposes but, in reality, devoted to the political objects of the party, including the appointment of committees and delegates, and the arrangement of an elaborate electoral organization with a regular chain of subordinated agitators and authorities.

The acknowledged ideals of Social-Democracy being what they were, the state of things described, argued the Minister, constituted a danger, eventual, no doubt, but none the less real, to public order, on which Society could not afford to look with folded hands. Herr von Nostitz asserted the connection of Bebel's partizans with a Russian Nihilist, Zedkin,⁹³ and affirmed that the eventuality of an appeal to arms had been discussed at Leipzig, persons having been named as proper, in such case, to be made away with. His Excellency further read extracts from a threatening letter addressed to the authorities of Leipzig, and an article from the Zurich 'Social-Democrat', the organ of the 'Moderates', which stated as alternatives the triumph of the Revolution, and the resort to powder and dynamite. The execution of the measure of expulsion⁹⁴ might, he said, be liable to criticisms of detail, but the hardships which fell upon the

92 The Social Democrats' assault in the *Landtag* against government chicanery during the 1881 Reichstag campaign had considerable resonance in drawing attention to the anti-socialist behaviour of lower civil servants in the kingdom, one of whom wrote that "it is impossible to use kid gloves to unleash a law that is exceptional in its nature and aims." District office (*Amtshauptmannschaft*) Glauchau to Saxon ministry of the interior, October 29, 1881, cited in Robert Arsenschek, *Der Kampf um die Wahlfreiheit im Kaiserreich* (Düsseldorf, 2003), 308. Eventually the Reichstag's Election Oversight Committee became involved after a number of Saxon elections in 1881 were annulled. See also August Bebel, *Petition an den Deutschen Reichstag, die polizeilichen Ausweisungen aus dem Königreich Sachsen betreffend* (Nuremberg, 1882).

93 Possibly Nostitz-Wallwitz is referring to Clara Zetkin's lover, Ossip Zetkin (1850–89).

94 That is, the expellee clause (§28) of the Anti-Socialist Law.

individuals removed must not be charged on the Government. Their responsible authors were the agitators who, in defiance of law, maintained a propaganda which it was the duty of the authorities to combat.

No debate followed. I have the best reasons for believing that Bebel was quite accurate in affirming that the application of the ‘lesser’ state of siege to Leipzig was a Government electioneering manoeuvre. There is, no doubt, too much system in the Minister’s description of the Socialist organization, and the incendiary writings quoted were to a great extent, as he himself admitted, mere “scribble-scrabble.” My Russian colleague tells me that there was no motive for ascribing Nihilist connections, or even ideas, to the Russian, Zedkin (named above), except in the oratorical necessities of Herr von Nostitz-Wallwitz.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/165.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 46, Dresden (November 18, 1881)

The Reichstag elections of October 1881 kept Social Democracy in check, for the most part, but Bismarck could not cry victory. After the election he faced more left liberals and other opponents of his economic policy and assaults on liberty than he had before the poll.

The final election returns shew that the constituencies of this Kingdom have taken their proportionate share in the recent displacement of the ‘legitimate’ political parties.⁹⁵

The Saxon contingent to the Reichstag is 23 members. Of these 4 belonged to the ‘German’ [Conservative] and 6 to the ‘Free’ Conservative, or ‘Ambassador’, Fraction. As the former have gained one seat, and the latter have lost two, the Conservatives are virtually weakened; but two ‘compromise’ members may possibly join them, in which case there will be a joint gain of a seat.

The National-Liberals have shrunk from 5 to 2, or just a quarter of their strength [of deputies from Saxony] in the Reichstag of 1871. They claim the sympathies of the new member for Dresden; but if Dr. [Alfred]

95 See [map S.4.5](#) in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*, showing the winning party (and its opponents) in each of Saxony’s twenty-three electoral districts in 1881. [Map S.4.6](#) shows the 1881 “party bastions” where the winner amassed more than 60 per cent of the vote on the first ballot.

Stübel is true to his electioneering programme, he will sit apart with the so-called ‘savages’ [*Wilde* or independents].

Going further left, signs are seen of the change which has been in process in the greater part of the Empire. The Progressists and Secessionists have grown from 2 to 4, or, perhaps, 5, – a development corresponding numerically with the increased force of these groups in Germany as a whole.

The Social-Democrats have lost two seats, and now number 4 members against 2 in 1871.

As regards the maintenance of the Right at something like its’ previous level, I should remark that the Saxon Conservatives are not ‘Mamelukes’, or adherents of the party of ‘Bismarck sans phrase’.⁹⁶ They have, as a rule, specifically repudiated the Tobacco Monopoly, and the Railway Scheme, and have dissented from some of the Reichskanzler’s other ideals, so that their survival here has not the same significance which it has in Prussia.

On the whole, what is true for Germany is true for Saxony. The question of upsetting a Minister, or a Government, or changing a system, was not before the constituencies. What the electors laid on their representatives was this: – ‘no Tobacco Monopoly or Imperial Railroads, no Experiments in ‘Government-Socialism[’], no tampering with particular State Rights, or the liberties of the Parliament. If the Reichskanzler governs on these principles he is to be supported: if no, not’. A strong feeling of distrust of the solidity of Prince Bismarck’s fiscal reforms was also present, but, not, I think, a desire to reopen his recent finance and tariff legislation.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/165.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 28, Dresden (June 18, 1882)

Strachey reports that a Conservative loss to a left-liberal “Progressist” in a hotly contested Saxon by-election has prompted the Conservatives’ leading newspaper in Saxony, the Dresdner Nachrichten, to unleash a torrent of antisemitic abuse on the Left. The electoral district of Meißen-Großenhain, where agriculture was still more prominent than industry, even in the 1890s, had been a Conservative stronghold since 1867.

96 The Imperial and Free Conservative Party. In Saxony, Conservatives generally made little or no distinction between allegiance to the German or Free Conservative parties.

The 'Free-Conservative' member in the Reichstag for the Circle [electoral district] of Meissen, Professor Richter,⁹⁷ lately resigned his seat, which he had occupied for 8 years, on nomination to Government employment.⁹⁸

Three candidates offered for the vacancy: a Conservative, a Social-Democrat who had unsuccessfully opposed the ex-member at the last general election [October 1881], and a Progressist, Herr Kämpffer,⁹⁹ who is an architect and house-owner.

At a first election neither of the candidates obtained an absolute majority. At the casting [run-off] election the Progressist, with 7000 votes, defeated the Conservative by a majority of 550, the aggregate poll being somewhat under 3/4^{ths} of the registered constituency [electorate], shewing an electoral participation above the German average.

The successful candidate appears to have received a certain support from the Social-Democrats who, as a rule, treat the Progressists with rancorous hostility. It is a sign of the times that the violent repulsion between the two parties should have been thus overcome.

All the vials of Conservative wrath are being poured on the local authors of the coalition, and on Herr Eugen Richter, whose personal interposition in favour of his partizan is bitterly resented on account of his being a Prussian. The Conservative 'Dresdner-Nachrichten' – a journal whose unsurpassed fertility in political vituperations, calumny, and falsehood, I have often had occasion to exemplify – has been discussing the election with its usual amenities of language. The Liberals are foreigners, – Berlin Talmudists, – apostles of the Golden-Calf, – agents of the international Hebrew banking-league, – Manchester vampires who prey on the working man, and suck his blood by usury, stock-jobbing, and writing down figures at a desk.

The fundamental note of such tirades is characteristic of the Conservative press. The monied classes of Germany belong, as a rule, to one grade or other of the liberal party, and it is the practise of the Conservatives and [antisemitic] 'Reformers' to describe mercantile and banking business as

97 Gustav Richter (1833–84), professor at the Royal Saxon Forest Academy in Tharandt since 1870, Reichstag deputy for the seventh Saxon electoral district of Meissen (1874–82), and *Landtag* deputy (1873–84).

98 Reichstag deputies were not allowed to retain their seat if they accepted a civil service appointment.

99 Eduard Kaempffer (1827–97) was a *Baumeister* in Leipzig. He belonged to the democratic wing of the Progressive Party, and he advocated close cooperation with the Social Democrats. After the by-election victory described here, he represented Meissen until 1884.

comparatively degrading, and dishonorable in its gains – an idea which even Prince Bismarck has condescended to countenance.¹⁰⁰

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/166.¹⁰¹

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 26, Dresden (September 12, 1883)

Strachey reverts to sarcasm to describe “Bismarckian nostrums for the extinction of political heresy.” The number of votes cast for Social Democratic candidates to the Saxon Landtag, with its three-mark threshold for enfranchisement, continues to grow. So do those cast in support of Saxon antisemites.

The biennial meeting of the Saxon parliaments occurring this year, one third of the members of the Landtag have vacated their seats as the Constitution directs.

The Polls for the renewals took place yesterday. There were two vacancies in Dresden, and the late members, a Conservative and a Progressist, were re-elected. But large minorities were obtained by the candidates of the extreme right and left. The Social-Democrat, [Georg von] Vollmer [*sic*]¹⁰² received nearly half as many votes as the Progressist, while the representative of the most debased species of political feeling (or ignorance), – the Anti-Semite, or ‘Reformer’ (*sit venia verbo!*¹⁰³) – had support powerful enough to constitute a disgrace to the electoral body.

100 See also Strachey’s report dated February 9, 1877, about Rudolf Meyer’s pamphlet, *Politische Gründer und die Corruption in Deutschland* (Political Founders and the Corruption in Germany) (Berlin, 1877): it was representative of the “malicious calumnies of Agrarians, Protectionists, and other reactionary Politicians.” Anti-Jewish accusations of the sort propagated by Meyer and other “Enemies of the Empire,” reported Strachey, “have been believed far and wide,” and they contributed to the strong showing of the “extreme parties” in the elections of January 1877. Excerpted in *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 1:321–2.

101 Scans of this report were provided to the author by Markus Mößlang.

102 Georg von Vollmar (1850–1922) was the leader of Social Democrats in Bavaria and headed the reformist wing of the party, most prominently in the early 1890s, when he dissociated himself from the doctrine of a sudden overthrow of society according to Marxist doctrine. He was a Reichstag deputy from 1881 to 1918, with the exception of 1887–90; he sat in the lower house of the Saxon *Landtag* from 1883 to 1889.

103 Latin: “Excuse the word.” The English idiom would be “pardon my French.”

The results in the rest of Saxony are as yet incompletely known. But if, as is reported, in Chemnitz ..., Social-Democracy has easily beaten the combined conservative and liberal parties, an instructive illustration will have been furnished on the efficacy of Bismarckian nostrums for the extinction of political heresy.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/167.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 37, Dresden (December 6, 1883)

Strachey reports on more confrontations between Social Democrats in the Saxon Landtag and the Saxon government. The British envoy's ears pricked up when Wilhelm Liebknecht compared the English and German labour movements.

At the meeting of the [Saxon *Landtag*] Chambers, which have just opened for the Biennial Session, the Government introduced a Bill for the Reform of the law on the Miner's Friendly Societies.¹⁰⁴

In a preliminary debate, which chiefly turned on local and technical details, the Bill was somewhat roughly handled by the two great orators of the Landtag, the Social-Democrats [Wilhelm] Liebknecht and [August] Bebel.

Complaining of the suspicions with which his party was regarded, and of the disinclination to treat the workman as "a man and a brother", as exemplified in the proposal to maintain the obligatory miner's books (*livrets*),¹⁰⁵ Liebknecht diverged from his subject in a marked manner to eulogize our treatment of Social questions. He said: – 'look at England – there are no Social-Democrats there! The people whose names appear as agitators are not Socialists at all. And why? Because it is the Government, and the ruling classes, who have taken the initiative in reforms. The English social legislation goes further than the German, which is a mere set of bureaucratic poor-law regulations, and, moreover, is still mostly on paper. In Germany the police are always throwing obstacles in the workman's path: in England this is never the case. The English workman does not look on the state and its' organs as enemies, as the

104 The Saxon *Landtag* was opened on November 15, 1883. The debate in the second chamber concerning reform of the Saxon Mining Act of 1868 and, in particular, the miners' welfare and insurance fund (*Knappschaftskasse*), took place on November 26.

105 *Livret d'ouvrier* or employment record book.

German artizan does: the policeman is not a spy, but a helper who aids him against misfortune. In this way the English Government has broken off the point of the workman's movement: if this had not been done in Germany the Governments were to blame.' –

Although this comparison is evidently strained, being, in particular, unjust to the attempts now being made here to solve social questions, it rests on the fact that Germany suffers from the class antagonisms, the comparative absence of which amongst ourselves has given us, as Macaulay said, the most aristocratic democracy and the most democratic aristocracy in the world.¹⁰⁶ But such language sounds strange from Liebknecht who, with his followers, have constantly spoken of us as a people amongst whom the tyranny of capital and class rules unrestrained. The leading idea of German Social-Democracy is, that the fabric of Society must be subverted, not repaired, and Liebknecht can hardly be sincere in promising the palliatives applied to institutions on which he invokes destruction, root and branch. Liebknecht's eulogy of our system was answered by [Saxon Interior Minister] Herr [Hermann] von Nostitz-Wallwitz who, in his usual biting style, scorned the idea of going for lights in government and progress to a country from which Germany had, in many respects, nothing to learn, especially in these days of reform by dynamite.¹⁰⁷ His Excellency is, of course, aware, that dynamite is not a domestic British development, but his argument told well as an oratorical point, and he has a genuine conviction that the German political and social evolution is proceeding on sounder lines than ours.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/167.*

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 5, Dresden (January 17, 1884)

The task of refuting August Bebel's critique of Saxon repression has fallen to government councillor Otto von Ehrenstein, who follows the pattern of his superiors by belittling socialist theory about a future state (Zukunftstaat). There, claims Ehrenstein – grotesquely twisting arguments

106 "Thus our democracy was, from an early period, the most aristocratic, and our aristocracy the most democratic in the world." Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II* (orig. 1848), vol. 1, ch. 1 (Project Gutenberg, 2008, online).

107 Referring to the Fenian dynamite campaign. The Explosive Substances Act of April 9, 1883, was passed through Parliament in one day in response to a spate of bombing by Irish-American conspirators.

from Bebel's book of 1879, *Woman and Socialism* – no cash is needed, every kind of work is “assigned by local committees,” and communal kitchens have been mandated for everyone. By contrast, Strachey reports that August Bebel's powers as an orator “are highly appreciated,” even by Landtag deputies sitting across the aisle from him.

The presentation of a parliamentary petition, respecting an alleged illegal prohibition of a meeting by the municipality of a Saxon town, has given rise to an animated debate in the Landtag, in which the Social-Democrats [August] Bebel, [Wilhelm] Liebknecht, and [Georg von] Vollmar, took part.

After an opening speech from Bebel on the formal aspects of the question, Herr [Otto] von Ehrenstein,¹⁰⁸ for the Government, discussed at large the attitude of Social-Democracy towards Society and the State. The Socialist ideal, he said, had two central points – the suppression of private life, and the suppression of professional employment. In the world of Social-Democracy no one was to have any particular calling, or any separate, private, existence. Human activity was to be limited to the equal production and distribution of the necessities of life. The earth was to be divided into districts, and to each individual of the human race his portion of work, and his portion of enjoyment, were to be assigned by local committees. These fundamental notions had been clearly developed in a book by Bebel, published in Zurich, called “Woman in the present, past, and future”.¹⁰⁹ This work went further: mankind were to have no money, and were not to eat in their own houses. Bebel had written: “as the new society has no wares, it has no money”: also – “in the society of the future the entire preparation of victuals will be a social arrangement: the private kitchen is abolished.” This programme is to be attained by “the expropriation of the expropriators”, that is, by a comprehensive spoliation, and a general redistribution of property.

The rejoinders of the Socialists were of a very rambling description. Liebknecht ridiculed the Government Commissary for giving a long lecture

108 Otto von Ehrenstein was a Conservative member of the Saxon *Landtag* 1873–8, government counsellor (*Regierungsrat*) in the Saxon Ministry of the Interior 1882–7, and regional governor of Leipzig 1887–1906.

109 August Bebel, *Die Frau und der Sozialismus*, was soon republished as *Die Frau in der Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft*, 20th ed. (Stuttgart, 1893). A well-introduced and annotated edition appeared as part of Bebel's collected works: *BARS*, vol. 10, pt. 2 (Munich, 1996). An English translation by Daniel de Leon is entitled *Woman under Socialism* (New York, 1971). Cf. the intriguing analysis in Anne Lopes and Gary Roth, *Men's Feminism: August Bebel and the German Socialist Movement* (Amherst, NY, 2000).

full of the stalest facts, and of distorted extracts from a book. Every one, he said, was perfectly well aware that a secret propaganda of Socialism existed. But this propaganda was the result of an idea, of necessity; and it was the work of circumstances, not of persons. Certainly his party had not been reformed by the Imperial Law against Social-Democracy, which had driven them still further left – “The Social-Democrats were now what they always had been. They had never given up an iota of their programme, and would, under all circumstances, continue to strive for victory for their ideas.”

Bebel said that his book on ‘Woman’ contained, in addition to the orthodox doctrines of the party, ideas of his own which were open to discussion. The Government had better get its’ prohibition by the Bundesrath repealed, and he would then serve their turn by issuing a popular edition, when, if as had been asserted, it was such nonsense, the publication would act as an antidote to Social-Democracy. In his opinion the evolution of humanity was directed towards the realisation of the Socialist programme, and, if so, no miserable little Police regulations would stop the movement. In the contrary case Socialism would never be able to impel mankind in the path supposed. It was not true that he had described the Paris Commune of 1871 as a mere elementary, small-shopkeeperish, piece of work. His meaning was, that various causes, in particular “the absence of coal and iron”, had made the conditions of labour in France such that the development of a thorough socialism was checked.

Some speakers of the [Progressive] Fortschritt party questioned the correctness of the prohibition of the meeting, and expressed disapproval of the Law of the Empire against Social-Democracy, which they denounced as seeking progress by revolution, whereas the Progressists desired development by law.

The Landtag invariably hears the four Socialist members with patience and fairness. Even the majority, which is Conservative, has a strong sense of legality, and Bebel’s remarkable powers are highly appreciated, so that there was every disposition to give the complaint exhaustive consideration. Some effect may have been produced by the official picture of the Utopia whose quintessence was the absence of money, the enjoyment of pleasures under the orders of Committees, and dining at tables d’hôte. But the ultimate rejection of the petition was partly owing to an informality in its’ terms, and to a technical justification having been found for the prohibition of the Grossenhain meeting.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 14, Dresden (February 23, 1884)

Strachey continues to be impressed by Social Democratic deputies in the Saxon Landtag. But near the end of his report he signals that he, too, is beginning to weary of “the torrent of Bebel’s and Liebknecht’s eloquence.”

The Social-Democrats in the Landtag are discharging their assumed duties as Tribunes of the People with an activity not shewn by them in any previous session. They intervene in every sitting with questions, motions, remonstrances, and explanations, denouncing things and persons in language which, but for the privilege of Parliament would involve them in endless prosecutions for libel and sedition.

Lt. [Georg] von Vollmar is a ready and incisive debater: [Wilhelm] Liebknecht would be an ornament to the most illustrious of Assemblies: and such is the eloquence of [August] Bebel, that no topic is so mean that he cannot raise it in a few sentences to first-rate interest and importance.

Hitherto the combined majority of Conservatives (42), National-Liberals (15), and Progressists (19), has heard them with attention and tolerance, the President, who is a Conservative, shewing himself admirably impartial, and a determined stickler for the liberty of debate.

However the daily Philippics of this ‘fourth party’ – their defiant manner, interruptions, and altercations with the chair – their invectives against officials – their hardly covered appeals to eventual Revolution – (I am using the language of Saxon politicians) – all this which, in effect, if not in intention, is obstruction, is tiring the Chamber.

Accordingly the majority are beginning to resort to the *clôture*,¹¹⁰ for which justification might be given on other grounds. I find, for instance, that of 54 speeches delivered in certain recent debates, 25 were made by the 3 Social-Democrats. The other 76 members can hardly be expected to go on submitting to this, especially, as the torrent of Bebel’s and Liebknecht’s eloquence far overflows the limits of time traditional for parliamentary speaking here. Their oratory can never influence the house: its’ object is the utilisation, for the benefit of their partisans out of doors, of the only place except the Reichstag where Social-Democracy is not gagged.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/168.*

110 French: “motion for the close of debate.”



Figure 15. Social Democratic identification card, 1885. Forced underground by the Anti-Socialist Law, Social Democrats relied on clandestine organization and solidarity. This is a facsimile of a document issued to the twenty-four-year-old sculptor Friedrich Heinke, a married man with no children, who had been expelled from Berlin and its environs on September 15, 1883, under §28 of the Anti-Socialist Law. It urges all party comrades to assist Heinke any way they can. The document is dated at Dresden, February 14, 1885, and is signed by Ignaz Auer, August Bebel, Carl Grillenberger, Wilhelm Hasenclever, and Wilhelm Liebknecht.

Source: Author's collection.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 31, Dresden (May 7, 1884)

Strachey cites Saxony's minister of war as typical of those in official circles who believe the Anti-Socialist Law is breaking the spirit of Social Democracy and therefore should be renewed. They could not be more wrong, Strachey reports, although their instruments of repression are substantial and deployed widely. Election results, he concludes, tell a very different story.

General [Alfred von] Fabrice expects the Reichstag to pass the Bill for renewing the repressive measures of 1878 against Social-Democracy. In Germany the persons in the service of the Crown form a caste apart, no individual of which dares, or desires, to differ from the opinions which they all profess. The views of every one about everything political or administrative are absolutely identical with those in the given State, and of this rule the question on which I am writing is a signal exemplification. There is a perfect consensus of official opinion here, not only that under the law of 1878 Social Democracy has been silenced, but that the influence of [August] Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht has been partly broken, and that the numbers and enthusiasms of their followers have diminished. Not long ago, the Saxon employé who is best versed in the subject assured me that the Catiline restlessness,¹¹¹ the obstructive parliamentary tactics, the aggressive language, of the Socialists in the Landtag indicated their consciousness that they were now the generals of a diminished and demoralized army – a description of Bebel and Liebknecht from which the [Saxon] King [Albert], who was present at the conversation, visibly dissented.

It is a natural consequence of the application of the coercive law, that the materials on the ground of which propositions of this sort might be safely affirmed or denied are no longer available. No Saxon newspaper propagating the obnoxious doctrines now survives. Permission to hold meetings for discussion of topics likely to provoke the utterance of their peculiar opinions is systematically refused to prominent agitators or adherents of the party. Public meetings proper very seldom occur in North Germany, and any speaker who ventured to enunciate Socialist ideas, in however diluted a shape, would be immediately silenced by the Police. Last winter, however, Bebel and others were allowed to lecture in Dresden on neutral topics, such as strikes, Commercial Crises, the condition of the Bricklayers trade, the Arabian Culture-period in history &c. &c.

111 Referring to Lucius Sergius Catilina (108?–62 BCE), a Roman politician who organized an unsuccessful conspiracy against Cicero (63–2 BCE).

The control of writings is very strict. Even the stupidity of Russian censorship has been equalled here. There has been a prohibition of the ‘Quintessence of Socialism’ [1875], a scientific and conservative work, by the Ex-Austrian Minister [Albert] Schäffle;¹¹² also of Bebel’s recent book on ‘Women’, an interference which the King (who is not affected by Caste views), thought absurd: but these prohibitions did not originate in Saxony.

I see in the English London periodicals “To day” and “Justice”, the statement that “the principal townships in Germany are in a state of siege”. In Leipzig the so-called “lesser state of siege” is still in force.¹¹³ This institution looks very formidable in the text of the anti-Socialist law, but in Leipzig, (as in Hamburg and Berlin), the authorities have only taken advantage of the paragraph which enables them to withdraw the right of residence to persons whose presence may be considered to endanger the public peace.

In 1882–3 there were 13 cases of such removal under the Act, and 65 of the usual requests for temporary leave to return from partisans previously expelled. Last year the persons who now assert that Socialism is in process of extinction were desirous to arouse a belief in its increase, and the above figures were quoted in proof that there had been a local augmentation of the enemy’s forces, and that the old agitators of Leipzig were pertinaciously adhering to their former plans and connections.

One of the individuals who returns at intervals by permission of [Interior Minister] Herr [Hermann] von Nostitz-Wallwitz to his former headquarters is Bebel. The Socialist leader, who was a working turner, and is joint owner (with a Conservative partner) of a small manufacturing of door-handles, frequently asks for leave of absence to attend to his affairs in Leipzig. The Minister of the Interior recently told me that the great orator’s door-handles are nearly as excellent as his speeches, and that he should not think it fair to prevent Bebel from time to time looking after his interests in that department.

The coercive system having driven the party to Earth the police are gradually losing sight of its wire-pullers and organization. But for the Reichstag, and the Saxon Landtag, German Social-Democracy would be

112 Dr. Albert Schäffle (1831–1903) was a German sociologist, political economist, editor, and interpreter of Marx. In *Die Quintessenz des Sozialismus* (orig. 1875), 25th ed. (Gotha, 1920) and *Die Aussichtslosigkeit der Sozialdemokratie* (The Futility of Social Democracy) (orig. 1885) Schäffle developed a critique of socialism, which focused on the problem of production in socialist collectives. His conclusion was that classical socialism and democracy were incompatible.

113 The “Minor State of Siege,” §28 of the Anti-Socialist Law, with its expulsion clause. See other notes, above.

a secret conspiracy like that of the “Carbonari”, or ‘Mary-ann’.¹¹⁴ When the Saxon Government had to show reason last year in the Bundesrath for the continuance of the ‘lesser state of siege’ in Leipzig, the following statistics were all they could add to the figures above given.

On 3 occasions in the previous annual period, there were seized packets of the Zurich [newspaper] ‘Social-Democrat’ which contained copies of that periodical far in excess of the wants of the local market. The inference was natural, that Leipzig is still a centre of Socialist agitation, from which numerous sympathizers, undeterred by risks, disseminate the literature of the party. Again: – the reports in Socialist journals on provincial Saxon incidents connected with the movement shew a familiarity with details of things and persons which proves how deeply the connexions of Social-Democracy ramify into the various circles of Society. Further: the two leading personages of the party (Bebel and Liebknecht), after their expulsion from Leipsic [*sic*], established themselves in a small village [Borsdorf] in the immediate boundary of the proclaimed district, where they were joined by two other agitators, in view, as might be surmised, of subterraneous study and encouragement of the Socialist propaganda.¹¹⁵ What, then, could be plainer, than that if Social Democracy has been silenced its vitality was unimpaired?

This seems a very meagre minimum of fact to set forth by a Government which disposes of such a highly disciplined army of local administrators and such an inquisitorial police. Their proper interpretation is doubtful, and equally ambiguous, I think, is the information yielded by the electoral statistics of the periods previous, and subsequent, to the passing of the [Anti-Socialist] Act of 1878. As the present despatch has already attained an inconvenient length, I will defer to another opportunity my observations on this point, which it will be in my power to elucidate by some local figures prepared for my use at the Ministry of the Interior.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/168.*

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 40, Dresden (October 11, 1884)

Strachey provides another detailed analysis of the contest to represent Dresden in the upcoming Reichstag elections. The “parties of order” are

114 The Carbonari was an Italian secret society in the early nineteenth century. Mari-
anne was the name of a republican secret society during the Second French Empire
of Napoleon III.

115 See Schröder, *Blickpunkt Borsdorf*.

again determined to avoid the odium of having August Bebel represent their city. But the candidates have proliferated: as in 1881, liberal and antisemitic challengers threaten anti-socialist unity.

The approach of the General Election for the Reichstag cannot be described as provoking any political effervescence here. The preliminary canvass is in process, and candidates are holding meetings, but there is no trace of the excitement which a Dissolution of Parliament causes amongst ourselves.

The constituencies are now no longer perplexed by the old multiplication of parties, and complexity of programmes. The gradual extinction of the National-Liberals, and the fusion of the Progressists and Secessionists as 'United-Liberals',¹¹⁶ has reduced the effective political fractions from seven to four, while in consequence of the adoption of Prince Bismarck['s] plans of Social Reform, and the withdrawal, real or apparent, of his more obnoxious schemes (such as Tobacco-Monopoly; Railway Imperialism, Chancellor-Dictatorship, and the like), nearly all the former burning questions have dropped from discussion.

For Saxony the grand electoral problem is – will [August] Bebel again sit for Dresden (old town), as he did in two former Parliaments previous to the loss of his seat to the Chief Burgomaster of the capital [Alfred Stübel], the nominee of a coalition of the 'Parties of Order'?

Dr. Stübel having declined to come forward again, the right wing of his supporters are running as candidate Herr [Kurt] von Einsiedel,¹¹⁷ a high official, who will be backed by the Conservatives of both shades, 'Free' and 'German'.

The new Liberals have put forward Herr [Ernst] Engel,¹¹⁸ a statistician of high repute in his own department, but who has yet to make his mark in politics.

116 The union occurred in March 1884 with the founding of the German Radical Party (Deutsche Freisinnige Partei).

117 Georg Kurt von Einsiedel was a retired colonel, former district governor in Annaberg, and former regional governor of Dresden. In 1879, he had written to the Saxon ministry of the interior, "It is true that Social Democracy presently remains silent, but it survives underground with undiminished strength.... In the next Reichstag elections [Social Democrats] will assert their influence everywhere, as experience shows. What might have been achieved ten years ago can no longer be made up for now." Letter of March 11, 1879 (draft), Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden, Kreishauptmannschaft Dresden, Nr. 108.

118 Ernst Engel (1821–96) was a famous German economist and statistician. Until 1860, when he was summoned to Berlin as director of Prussia's statistical office, he made his career in Saxony, having been born in Dresden and having established the Royal Saxon Statistical Office in the 1850s.

Dresden is again disgraced by the candidature of an 'Anti-Semite', otherwise 'Reformer' or 'Christian Socialist'. The representative of the 'Jew-bait' party is Herr [Gustav] Hartwig,¹¹⁹ a builder and member of the town-council, and prominent in that body through a noisy advocacy of impracticable schemes of municipal economic reform.

As has been frequently explained in my correspondence, the strength of the followers of Bebel is utterly incalculable. The approaching solution of the problem may bring some surprises: it is at present safest to say, that he may probably head the poll, but hardly by the prescribed 'absolute' majority, so that a casting [run-off] election will be required. 'Good Society' considers the membership of the great Socialist Tribune as an opprobrium and menace to the capital and the dynasty, and will warmly support the Conservative candidate, who, however, as being an aristocrat and courtier, and of curious, unimposing personality, can have little hold on the middle-class voter. The statistician [Engel] will not raise the enthusiasm of the new Liberals, and if the apostle of bigotry and of impatience of necessary taxation [Hartwig] is a stronger man, people do not take him quite seriously.

A recurrence of the coalition of 1881 is not very likely. Prince Bismarck's behaviour to the new Liberals has so irritated them, that if there is again a casting poll between Bebel and one of the other candidates, they will probably be disposed to stand aloof, and leave the Conservatives to fight their own battles with ['Social-Democracy'].

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/168.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 44, Dresden (October 25, 1884)

Social Democrats are fighting against countless obstacles to get August Bebel elected again in Dresden. Strachey deems the campaign to be torpid, but this is a British prejudice found in many of his reports and those of his colleagues and successors. While it might be true that the Reichstag elections of 1884 lacked the drama of those in 1878 and 1887, the stakes were still high for the outlawed SPD and for its rivals.

119 Gustav Hartwig (1839–1908) was a *Baumeister* in Dresden. From 1882 to 1902, with one short interruption, he was a municipal assemblyman there. From the mid-1880s onward he was a leader of Dresden's antisemitic lower-middle-class elements (*Mittelstand*), thereby coming into conflict with the Dresden city council (*Stadttrat*) and the local German Conservative leaders. On Hartwig and the 1884 contest in Dresden-Altstadt, see Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 220–1.

The preparations for the election of Tuesday next are proceeding with the absence of excitement natural in a country where public policy may be controlled, but is not imposed, by the Electorate.

The electioneering morals of the Empire exclude a personal canvass. The respective Committees print, placard, and circulate amongst the constituency, appeals on behalf of their candidates, who address their party at meetings, but do not otherwise solicit votes. Parliamentary place hardly gives a German any appreciable social importance, or influence ~~except in the case of the great party chiefs~~, and it is very hard to find suitable persons who are willing to have legislatorship thrust upon them.

As the labor of electioneering falls on the Committees, so, in part, do the costs, towards defraying which subscription lists are opened. ~~In 1881 the charges on behalf of the Burgomaster, Dr. Stubel, were said to be about £750.~~ Only a very wealthy candidate would, as rule, contribute to the expenditure on his account.

The abuses of persuasion, or intimidation, against which we have to make such drastic provision rarely occur ~~here in Germany, & especially in Saxony~~. Some pressure may be brought to bear by country gentlemen on their dependents, but the ballot generally makes it ineffective. It is not customary for the servants of the Government to attempt to bias the electors. Where exceptions occur, the official must carefully separate his personal from his public character, or the result will be a petition. Both in the Reichstag and Landtags there is Extreme jealousy of the purity of election, and members are unseated for very small errors of irregular influence. It is not etiquette for Ministers, or similar personages to mix in the electoral agitation.

The public portion of the costs of an election is much lessened by a curious circumstance. The polling places in towns are generally the large rooms of restaurants, which the proprietors are glad to lend gratis, in view of the additional custom brought them by the concourse of voters and spectators.

The position of the Socialists requires a separate explanation. At the last general Election the Saxon Government took advantage of the Law of 1878 against Social Democracy to prohibit the meetings and remove the placards of the party. In consequence of the strong Expressions of opinion in the Reichstag, that the Law in question was not applicable to electioneering times and circumstances, the Minister of the Interior¹²⁰ has abandoned his former position, and the Social Democrats ~~(as far as can be judged from ... information in the papers)~~ are now agitating without hindrance. Bebel's desire to meet his 10,000 Dresden supporters has

120 Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz.

been defeated, for the owners of the adequate public rooms have without exception refused to let their premises to the Socialist Committee. Bebel has therefore had to content himself with his street placards and a printed address, and as his supporters have to compensate themselves for their loss in not hearing the greatest orator in Germany. As the workmen of the capital have no meetings of their own, they have been attending in unwelcome numbers, and sometimes disturbing, the assemblies of the “parties of order”.

It is characteristic of Germany that the semi-official ‘[Dresdner] Journal’ has printed in detail the speech of the Conservative Champion,¹²¹ and has observed an absolute and persistent silence as to the fact that three other candidates are before the constituency here. Today’s ‘[Dresdner] Anzeiger’ says that the electors of Dresden are now fully in possession of the several party programmes, and that as all the arguments on every side are worn out, the paper refuses to print any more speeches.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/37 (draft), FO 68/168 (final).

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 45, Dresden (October 29, 1884)

The Reichstag elections of 1884 – when the Anti-Socialist Law had been in effect for more than six years – saw a remarkable increase in the number of votes and seats won by Social Democrats, in both Saxony and the Reich. For the two sets of results, see [table 9](#), below.

The Social Democrat leader [August] Bebel was at the head of the poll last night [October 28] for the city election with 8,620 votes;

[Gustav] Hartwig, “Reformer”	had -- 7,567;
[Kurt von] Einsiedel, “Coalition”,	---- 7,054;
[Ernst] Engel, “New-Liberal”,	----- 1,399;
Rochow, Catholic,	----- 239.

No candidate having obtained an “absolute majority”, i.e. more than half the entire votes, a casting [run-off] election¹²² is necessary between Bebel and Hartwig. As the Social-Democrats seldom muster in full force at the first trial, no opinion can be formed yet as to the present strength of the party. But as Bebel has polled 1600 votes more than he did in

121 That is, Kurt von Einsiedel.

122 Held on November 11, 1884.

1877, and only 280 less than in 1881, there is no present sign whatever of that palpable collapse of his influence with the working-class, and effacement of his doctrines, which has been visible to official persons as a consequence of the growing popular preference for the rival Socialism of Prince Bismarck.

There is an idea in the town, that the high poll of the “Reformer”, or Anti-Semite [Hartwig], was due to a strategem of the Socialists, some of whom voted for him, in order that Bebel’s strongest rival, the Conservative, might be beaten out of the field. At the casting election, so it is argued, the entire Socialist phalanx will be on the side of their leader, when it will be seen that the large accession of Social-Democracy just shown in Berlin has had its counterpart here. – This is speculation, and it seems to me that, as the line which divides the Conservatives from the Anti-Semites is a very fine one, the two parties will coalesce against Bebel, in which case he must be defeated, as he was three years ago, unless his adherents have increased in strength.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/168.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 46, Dresden (November 1, 1884)¹²³

Contrary to expectations in Saxony, the Social Democratic vote in the kingdom continues to rise, as Strachey reports with detailed information about individual election contests. He expresses his amazement that the non-socialist press is unwilling to report, or even believe, the continuing growth of a party experiencing such a degree of official persecution.

The elections have rudely dissipated the illusions which, as my correspondence has shewn, have been entertained here on the subject of Social Democracy.

It has been a cardinal point of Conservative and official faith, that Socialism was being stamped out by the coercion initiated six years ago, and that its’ diminished followers were beginning to contrast the empty promises of demagogues with the philanthropic realities of State-Socialism. Tuesday’s polls show, that what has been happening is the reverse of this.

123 This report was marked to be shown to (among others) Foreign Secretary Granville, Prime Minister Gladstone, and the Queen.

The Social-Democrats have completely emerged from the eclipse into which they temporarily fell after the Proscription¹²⁴ of 1878, and have made a new departure in energy and enthusiasm, which is obviously a consequence of the political persecution that was to intimidate them, as their improved party organisation and discipline is the undoubted result of the attempt to draw them, by the offer of official nostrums, from the leadership of [August] Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht.

Complete figures cannot be given until after the casting [run-off] elections, when the socialist vote may be largely augmented. I can say at present, that whereas after the dissolution of 1881, that vote in Saxony was 80,000, on Tuesday it reached nearly 127,000, the highest mark yet attained in the Kingdom.¹²⁵

As special examples of this increase I will take the cases of Leipzig, and Leipzig county, and the manufacturing city of Chemnitz, which is the German Manchester and Newcastle combined: (of Dresden nothing definite can yet be said). Leipzig, and Leipzig county, as I have often remarked, have enjoyed an extra turn of the repressive screw. In order that Bebel and Liebknecht might be got rid of, both the city and district have been kept under the so-called "Little State of siege". The utility of that measure may be judged from the circumstance that Bebel has just polled 9,676 votes,¹²⁶ while in 1881 the Candidate of his party only received 6,482 votes. In Leipzig county the effects of the 'Little State of siege' have been still more remarkable. The seat was held by a popular National Liberal manufacturer, or capitalist, to whose enterprise and intelligence the district had been largely indebted. Doctor [Karl] Heine¹²⁷ has lost it to a Social-Democrat, and it is noteworthy that his defeat has been the most crushing in the particular villages where his opportunities for personal influence were the greatest. Connecting these two Saxon facts with the portentous growth of Socialism revealed in Berlin and Hamburg, which have been under the same regime as Leipzig, I cannot resist the belief that the cause in each case has been the "Little State of Siege".

On the instance of Chemnitz I will not dwell further than to say, that in 1881, with a much lower poll, the "Parties of Order" received a much larger vote than now, while the Socialist (an editor from Stuttgart) who, at the first election then was in a minority, has now obtained on the first

124 That is, the Anti-Socialist Law of October 21, 1878.

125 The actual SPD vote totals in Saxony were 87,786 (1881) and 128,142 (1884); see [tables 8](#) and [9](#).

126 By the 1880s Bebel was nominated in dozens of electoral districts across the Reich.

127 See the earlier note on the municipal reformer Karl Heine.

trial a vote far in excess of the prescribed “absolute” majority (more than half of the entire poll.)¹²⁸

This large increase of votes has effected no corresponding change of seats. The Saxon contingent of the Socialist faction in the Reichstag will hardly be above its’ former strength of four members. It is characteristic of the Dresden press, that it persistently ignores the statistics above given, which I have had to compile for myself, and makes the shameless assertion, that this favoured Kingdom offers an exception to the alarming growth of the Social-Democracy throughout the Empire!

Of the other parties, I can only say at present that the New Liberals (Freisinnige) appear to have suffered the same ill-fortune which has overtaken them everywhere. Official spheres will see in the collapse of this party a perfect compensation for the alarming advance of Social-Democracy.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/168.*

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 49, Dresden (November 12, 1884)

Strachey begins his report by noting that the “parties of order” – as a matter of pride – again denied August Bebel the privilege of representing the Saxon capital in Berlin’s Reichstag. But overall the election increased the number of votes cast for SPD candidates in Saxony, from about 88,000 in 1881 (equal to 28 per cent of votes cast) to about 128,000 in 1884 (now 35 per cent of votes cast). In other words, the number of supporters of the “party of revolution” in Saxony increased 46 per cent from one election to the next.¹²⁹ In the German Empire as a whole, SPD votes rose from about 312,000 in 1881 (about 6 per cent of votes cast) to about 550,000 (almost 10 per cent) in 1884 – an increase that Strachey calls a “surprising jump.” Between those same two elections, the number of Social Democrats sitting in the Reichstag rose from four to five (in Saxony) and from twelve to twenty-four (in the entire Reich). In other words, opposing trends were evident. On the one hand, the SPD

128 The incumbent Bruno Geiser (1846–98), editor of the Social Democrats’ *Volksstaat* and, later, *Die neue Welt*, won 14,512 of 24,420 votes (59 per cent) in Chemnitz on the first ballot in 1884. In 1881 he had won 10,256 votes (47 per cent) on the first ballot and 14,512 votes (56 per cent) on the run-off ballot. Geiser had first represented the Social Democrats in the Reichstag in 1871.

129 Partly due to increased turnout in Saxony in 1884 (58.5 per cent), compared to 1881 (52.4 per cent).

continued to thrive in Saxony and was now supported by about one of every three voters there, whereas it drew only one in ten voters nationwide. On the other hand, Saxon deputies no longer dominated the party's national Reichstag caucus as they had in the 1870s. In 1878, two-thirds of the SPD's national caucus represented Saxon constituencies; that figure was reduced to one-third in 1881 and about one-fifth in 1884 (see tables 8 and 9).

At the final election for Dresden-Altstadt, [August] Bebel was again defeated by the triple coalition which placed him in a minority three years ago. The Socialist leader's poll was 2480 more than on November 28 [*sic* for October 28], but the 'Reformer', or Anti-Semite, [Gustav] Hartwig, receiving the support of the Conservatives and National-Liberals, obtained a majority of 2700, the entire vote being 24,896.

Reverting to previous years I find the polls for Bebel were:

1877: 10,830. 78: 11,617. 81: 10,827. and now: 11,103.

In Dresden, therefore, Social-Democracy keeps at a pretty constant level, and is not advancing with the surprising jump observed for the Kingdom as a whole, as well as for Berlin, Leipzig, Hamburg, Frankfurt, and a number of the other chief cities of Germany.

An election conducted under the conditions previously described, affords no indications of the wishes of the constituency except the desire of its upper and middle strata to save the capital from the stigma (as they call it) of being represented by Bebel, and deprive Bebel of the prestige (as they think) of the membership for Dresden. Hartwig has a certain popularity as the advocate of municipal reforms (of a dubious character[]), and he has affected a thin colour of Anti-Semitism calculated to please the shopkeepers and upper-classes. The essentials of his programme are as follows: maintenance of Protection to native industry, and of the military and naval strength of the Empire: a vigorous national Colonial policy; Saxon economic interests to be guarded, and the authority of the Kaiser and Reich to be supported: the Social Reform to be developed: no Parliamentary Government, or tobacco monopoly, or Imperial railway schemes. There is little in this to clash with the views of average Germans of any political party. The new member's notion of international legislation to secure a normal European work-day, and to limit the labour of women and children, and Sunday work, will be generally considered a Chimera.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No. 51, Dresden (December 2, 1884)

The British envoy reports that returns from the recent Reichstag election demonstrate that Social Democrats are expanding their voter support beyond the ranks of the proletariat, “upwards towards classes not formerly infected.”

The 28 [*sic* for 23] Saxon deputies to the Reichstag having finally taken their seats, the Conservatives of both grades, German and Free (or ‘Ambassador’ Fraction),¹³⁰ appear to have risen from 9 to 11, the Social-Democrats from 4 to 5, while the new United Liberals have fallen from 5 to 4, and the National-Liberals from 5 to 3.

These differences, except the last, roughly correspond with the changed proportions of the representation in Germany as a whole, and, as regards the Conservatives and Liberals, they reproduce, in an approximate way at least, the fluctuations of electoral feeling expressed by the polls of the several parties.

The additional Socialist means, however, the growth of the Bebelites from 85,000 in 1881 to 133,000 now, a number slightly in excess of the figure attained by them at the dissolution [of 1878] after the attempts on the Emperor’s life. The diminished muster of 1881 indicated their temporary discouragement and inactivity under the gagging act, from which the recoil is now complete.

It is indubitable that in Saxony, as elsewhere in the Empire, Socialist sympathies or, what may not be quite the same thing, Socialist electoral partizanship, are extending upwards to classes not formerly infected. As the subject is darkened by the silence on the proscribed party, it is impossible to say if the recruits are really adherents of Bebel’s doctrines, or if they only support him as Tribune of the People from a general sense of discontent and hatred of the possessors of wealth and power.

Finally, it may be said that the party which (with much inaccuracy) may be called ‘Governmental’¹³¹ has 14 Saxon members to 9 of the opposition, which was so at the previous general election, and, small oscillations being neglected, at previous dates.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/168.

130 The two parties were the German Conservative Party and the Imperial and Free Conservative Party.

131 Meaning the German and Free Conservatives and the National Liberals. The Radical Party and SPD together fielded nine deputies.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 28, Dresden (July 7, 1885)

A fistfight between English and German youths in Dresden – arising from disagreement about the prescribed duration of a lawn-bowling game – prompts Strachey to contrast the British and German penal codes.

A difference having arisen between the marker of the Dresden lawn-tennis court and two English youths (brothers, aged 15–17), as to the duration of a game, the marker made an offensive observation, to which one of the youths replied by a blow in the face. The marker's father, who owns the court, then interposing in his son's favour, was attacked by the second youth. The result of these collisions was, that both Germans were knocked down, and that the youths, with a companion who was not concerned in the affray, were taken into custody, and, after three days detention, bailed out on security for £500 being given for each of them. The Germans were not seriously injured, and were attending to their avocations as usual next day.

So extravagant is the severity of the new Imperial penal code,¹³² that the youths may not impossibly be sentenced to imprisonment for six or eight weeks, especially as the assaults were, in the eye of German law, "combined".

The advocate [lawyer] retained to defend the case informs me that he can advantageously urge explanation of the offence on two grounds. Firstly: Striking with the fists ("das boxen") does not indicate on the part of an Englishman malice prepense, for he is only acting under the impulsion of a natural national instinct. Secondly: English law minimizes the importance of trifling assaults, and punishes them with fines of two or three pounds, or with a few hours incarceration.

In these circumstances it would be useful to the defence that an authoritative statement should be available in regard to English practice in cases of simple assault, and I should be glad to be informed how an incident similar to the above would be dealt with in our Police Courts.¹³³

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/169.*

132 *Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich*, dated May 15, 1871, in force from January 1, 1872, revised in 1876.

133 A note on this dispatch reads, "In a private letter Mr Strachey asks for an answer by tel[egraph]: as the case comes on Friday, tomorrow." G.Dl. [George E. Dallas]; Sir J. Pouncefote; Qy: Tel[egraph] to Mr Strachey, 9 July.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 33, Dresden
(October 3, 1885)

The “great” show trial of August Bebel and some of his leading followers in Chemnitz was a complicated affair, with different courts confirming or overturning convictions. Near the end of this report Strachey expresses his admiration for Bebel. He contrasts the “harangues of the public prosecutor with Bebel’s “powerful,” “subtle,” and “resourceful” effort to win an acquittal.

A great trial of Social-Democrats is in process before the Chemnitz Landgericht.¹³⁴ Amongst the accused are [August] Bebel, [Georg von] Vollmar, and other members of the Socialist party in the German Reichstag. They are charged under Sections 128 and 129 of the Criminal Code,¹³⁵ relative to Secret Societies and associations for hindering the execution of the law, and of administrative measures.

The present phase of German Socialism dates from the Congress of Gotha in 1875,¹³⁶ when, as explained in detail in my correspondence of the time, Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht effected a fusion of the two factions in which Social-Democracy had fallen after the death of [Ferdinand] Lassalle. The so-called “German socialist workmen’s party” attained wide ramifications and had an elaborate machinery of committees, secretaries and wire-pullers, rules for admittance, subscriptions, and a recognized press organ, the Leipzig “Vorwärts”. The [Anti-] Socialist Law suppressed the visible corporate existence and action of this body but the proceedings of the Congress of Wyden, in 1880, and of the Congress of Copenhagen, in 1883, favored the belief that the penal legislation of 1878 had failed to reach the Social-Democratic propaganda and organization.¹³⁷ Occasional proofs of this fact might also be derived from the results of the elections, which could hardly be ascribed to a mere spontaneous development of the proscribed creed, and some significance

134 District court. The trial was held on September 28–30, 1885. It resulted in the acquittal of all nine defendants on October 7. But that was not the end of the trail for the defendants. See Strachey’s reports of October 16, 1885, and August 8, 1886, below.

135 *Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich*.

136 The Gotha Congress of May 22–7, 1875; see previous notes.

137 Strachey is referring to Social Democratic party congresses that had to be held outside Germany during the period of the Anti-Socialist Law (1878–90): the one in Wyden, Switzerland, convened on August 21–3, 1880, and the other in Copenhagen, between March 29 and April 2, 1883. A number of Social Democrats, once they were back on German soil, were arrested simply for having attended the Copenhagen meeting.

might be attached to certain articles in the Zurich ‘Social Democrat’,¹³⁸ the partly esoteric character which plainly shewed that they were addressed to the secretaries of a subterraneous society.

The fidelity with which the party keeps its secrets is amazing. Saxony has always been a chief centre of the socialist evolution, but the police, as I happen to be aware, have hitherto been curiously almost entirely ignorant of the inner life of Social-Democracy, their knowledge has been mainly inferential, derived, that is, from sources as those named above. The Chemnitz trial has not added a single new fact to what was known before: the Indictment only travels over the old *Crambe repetitia*.

Its point of departure is the participation of Bebel and others in the Congresses of Wyden and Copenhagen, which are described as having charged the socialist members of the German Reichstag with the direction of the administrative and pecuniary affairs of the party. Under this authority, contends the Public Prosecutor,¹³⁹ the defendants formed a junta, which has exercised a variety of functions, such as organizing districts, calling meetings, empowering and controlling Expenditure, expelling obnoxious partizans, &c.

The Indictment says: “their presence at the Congress of Copenhagen is to be considered as proving their complicity as delegates in deliberate activity in consolidating, spreading, developing, and strengthening the Socialist party connexion – an activity completely adequate to the conception of membership in a party combination in the sense of §§ 128 and 129 of the Criminal Code.” In the course of the usual interrogatory, the prisoners were asked by the Court how they understood the statement in the protocols of the Congress, and in the ‘Social-Democrat’, that the directory of their party had established “a new and effective organisation”: also, what meaning was attached to Expressions like “party-district”, “Central-Committee”, “Conferences”, “[“]Confidential agents”, “employés”, “archives-fund”, and the like.

The more important replies were made by Bebel, who observed that it was a matter of notoriety that the Socialists were animated by a community of principles and aims, and that their tactics consisted in the intimate relationship of man and man. This constituted the force of their Propaganda, which now law would prohibit; it was a survival from the earlier, unproscribed, days of Social-Democracy, and might reasonably be called an “organization”. Bebel further requested the Court to observe, that in spite of the Law of 1878 the Berlin Police had for some

138 *Der Sozialdemokrat*, established in 1879, was the party’s chief newspaper. Printed initially in Switzerland and later in London, it was smuggled into Germany in large numbers during the Anti-Socialist Law.

139 Saxon public prosecutor Christian Julius Schwabe.

time systematically tolerated an effective Social-Democratic “organization” for the elections, trade-societies, friendly and sick funds &c. As regards the expressions from which the prosecution sought to evolve the existence of a secret association, he need only say that they were for the most part mere survivals of an earlier jargon, and that the allusions incriminated were to arrangements for the elections, or for the support of partizans and their families who have been expelled from their places of residence by the Police.

Observing that the case was altogether one of constructive crime, Bebel asked: – “how is it, with their unlimited command of pecuniary means, that the police have been unable to discover any positive facts incriminating us, and are driven to try to establish our membership of their illegal secret society by mere argumentative deductions of the thinnest description.”?

As far as can be judged from the miserably imperfect accounts of the trial published in the local papers, Bebel displayed in his answer all the dialectical power, the subtlety, and resource, of which he is so unrivalled a master. The harangues of the public prosecutor, and the advocates of the Socialists, were expansions of the arguments given in outline above. Bebel judiciously refrained from making a general defence. The oratorical faculty of the German tribune of the people is as suited to a forensic as to a parliamentary occasion, but in the present disposition of Saxon judges his eloquence would probably have been less persuasive than his silence.

Sentence will be given in a few days; it is thought here that a conviction is inevitable.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/37 (draft), FO 68/169 (final).*

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 35, Dresden (October 16, 1885)

The Socialist trial at Chemnitz has become something of a disaster. Saxony's interior minister believes his colleague, the minister of justice, was unwise to prosecute in the first place. The former was correct in suggesting that a popular slogan would be adapted and emerge from the fiasco: “There are judges in Chemnitz,” meaning that justice in Saxony is not quite dead.

The trial of the Socialists at Chemnitz has terminated in their complete acquittal. The judgment of the Court argued at great length, that the public prosecutor had not established a single count of the indictment.



Figure 16. *The Arrest of the Propagandist*, undated [1880–9], oil on canvas. This scene played out countless times in Imperial Germany during the 1880s, but it depicts an arrest made in imperial Russia. It is by the Russian realist painter Ilya Yefimovich Repin (1844–1930), perhaps the most renowned Russian artist of the nineteenth century. It hangs in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Source: Wikimedia Commons.

His conception of an Association, or Society, was too extensive: his demonstration of the existence of such a Society was construed from mere quotations – a species of proof in itself objectionable, and one which, in this instance, had altogether broken down.

Further, said the Court, if any such Association as that assumed actually existed, it had not been shewn to be ‘secret’, and the alleged signs of ‘secret’ corporate life, such as money collections, administrative acts &c, being only those proper to every political party. Finally, although individual Social-Democrats had, in the sense of the Indictment, attempted to interfere with the execution of the law by disseminating prohibited writings, there was no proof that they had combined for this purpose secretly.

The Minister of the Interior [Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz], who has charge, ad interim, of the Foreign Office, informs me that he had disapproved of the prosecution, which had been undertaken on the initiative

of the Department of Justice. The existence of a Socialist Combination was unquestionable; but no criminal acts had been brought home to the accused; and it was an advantage that people would say, quoting the classical story of the windmill of Sans Souci, ‘il y a des juges à Chemnitz’.¹⁴⁰

It is characteristic of the German political Apathy that this trial has excited very little attention. But the repudiation by the Court of constructive offences, has been, I assume, generally approved.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/169.

**George Strachey to Earl of Iddesleigh,¹⁴¹ No. 18, Dresden
(August 8, 1886)**

The acquittal of the Social Democratic defendants at Chemnitz has been reversed. At a stroke, Strachey reports, Saxon justice has thrown in jail one-quarter of the SPD's Saxon caucus in the Reichstag.

In continuation of previous correspondence I have the honor to report, that the Freiberg Landgericht has condemned the members of the Imperial Parliament [August] Bebel, [Ignaz] Auer, [Georg] von Vollmar, [Louis] Viereck, [Karl] Frohme, and the printer [Carl] Ulrich, to 9 months imprisonment: the member [Johann Heinrich Wilhelm] Dietz, with [Philipp] Müller and [Stefan] Heintz, to 6 months.

The prolixity of the sentence, which was of amazing dimensions even for Germany, induced the local press to conform closely, in this instance, to their usual rule of making only cursory mention of the phenomena of the Socialist movement. From such abridged accounts as are available I have compiled the following brief statement which includes all the essentials of the verdict.

The judgment sets forth, that the accused were charged with combining with other persons to circulate in the Empire publications prohibited by the special Law of 1878 against Social Democracy. The Court took it as proved, that the Zurich ‘Social-Democrat’ had been brought into Germany in considerable numbers, and systematically circulated. This was effected on a scale, and with a regularity, which excluded the idea of the mere casual concurrence of individuals for the purpose. Behind the

140 Legend has it that the miller of Sans Souci responded to Prussian King Frederick the Great's threat to confiscate the mill (the noise of which was regarded as intrusive) by telling him that he could do so, if there were no judges to be found in Berlin.

141 Stafford Henry Northcote, 1st Earl of Iddesleigh (1818–87), was a Conservative British statesman who served as foreign secretary in the Cabinet of Lord Salisbury in 1886–7.

distributors, and controlling their movements, there must have been an organization with a guiding central force. The nature of this authority was revealed by allusions and remarks in the Zurich 'Social-Democrat', and in speeches by Socialists, as well as by the Protocols of the Congresses of Wyden and Copenhagen. At the Congresses, the 'Social-Democrat' was described as the organ of the party, that journals' material and financial condition were discussed, accounts produced, and the means for its dissemination debated. The Congresses were secretly summoned, they were presided over by Bebel, and attended by several of the accused, all of whom were present at the meeting at Copenhagen, where 60 German delegates appeared. Bebel and his associates were thus seen, *ipso facto*, to be members of the Socialist organization.

The 'Social-Democrat' was obviously a publication of the class prohibited by the repressive Law of 1878. To circulate it was therefore a breach of §129 of the German Criminal Code which denounces as penal the obstruction, by associated bodies, of legal or administrative measures. Such circulation has been traced by inference to the accused, who had thus been guilty of the offence in question.

The charge of participation in a secret society was taken as not proved. The connection of three of the prisoners with the Socialist party having been of comparatively recent standing, they were sentenced to the minor term of punishment.

As Your Lordship will perceive, the judgment only takes as actually demonstrated facts already of common notoriety, such as the circulation of the 'Social-Democrat' by an invisible agency, the existence of some species of organization within the Socialist body, and the like. The rest is pure conjecture. The Freiberg Court only identifies Bebel and his colleagues with the unseen disseminators of the 'Social-Democrat', by the adoption of that principle of constructive criminality which the Chemnitz Court rejected.

It is a fine stroke of the Saxon Minister of Justice to have thus obtained the extinction of nearly 1/4th of the Socialist parliamentary group for the duration of the next session of the Reichstag. But for the acquittal pronounced at Chemnitz, Bebel and Vollmar would have been in prison during the last session of the Saxon Landtag as well. It is curious that a prosecution which had the whole police power of the Empire at its disposal should have failed to add a single detail to such knowledge with respect to Social Democracy as was in everyone's possession – that after 8 years of espionage, gagging, and intimidation of the proscribed party, not a conclave has been surprised, not a compromising letter has been seized, not a word of betrayal has been heard. This negative result after so much high police pressure may perhaps be thought to be suggestive

of the fact that Social Democracy has probably no secrets to yield up. In my own belief, however[,] there is a fair, or even a larger, probability that Bebel and his friends are actually at the head of an organisation like that constructively assumed by the Freiberg Court. But to imprison them on this chance seems to resemble hanging Mr. Parnell and Mr. Healy for the murders in the Phoenix Park.¹⁴² Perhaps the raid of the Hamburg Police, just announced, on a meeting of Social Democrats, may lead to the discovery of the missing evidence.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/170.

**George Strachey to Earl of Iddesleigh, No. 25, Dresden
(September 25, 1886) (draft)**

Britain's envoy belittles the Saxon government's attempt to demonstrate that the "Minor State of Siege" imposed in 1881 on Leipzig and its environs should be extended.

The prolongation of the so-called minor state of siege in the districts of Leipzig having been recently approved by the Bundesrath, the 'Motives' of the Saxon authorities were in conformity with the provisions of the Act of 1878 against Social Democracy laid before the Reichstag.

The 'Motives' and, still more, the speech made in their support by the representative of the Government add fresh proof to the certainty that with all their apparatus of espionage, bribery, and intimidation, the German Police are altogether ignorant of the inner life of Social Democracy. Enlarging on the 'Motives', Herr von Ehrenstein¹⁴³ recited some utterly insignificant local details: an unusual number of leaflets with appalling contents were in circulation, there had been scenes in the streets of Leipzig, scandalous processions, strikes, and the like. No specimens or the names of subterranean literature thus incriminated are ever published, and ~~I have to say that I should be altogether unwilling to accept official German estimates.~~ the official German estimates of their character

142 The Phoenix Park murders were the fatal stabbings of Lord Frederick Cavendish and Thomas Henry Burke in Phoenix Park in Dublin on May 6, 1882. In March 1887, the *Times* printed letters purportedly from Charles Stewart Parnell claiming sympathy with the murderers. It emerged that the letters were forgeries, and Parnell was personally vindicated by the Parnell Commission in 1888–9. Timothy Michael Healy was an Irish nationalist politician, journalist, author, barrister, and one of the most controversial Irish MPs in the House of Commons.

143 See the earlier note on Otto von Ehrenstein.

are probably as reliable as the description of the Socialist scenes & processions, which in reality are incidents of the magnitude of the Sunday preachings of Messrs. Hyndman and Williams.¹⁴⁴

Herr von Ehrenstein proceeded to announce “a fact of the most serious and anxious character: namely the existence of proof, unhappily too positive, of an undeniable Connection of the German Social-Democracy with the Anarchists of America.” (Laughter from the Social-Democrats)....

A Socialist member, Herr [Georg] v[on] Vollmar, said that the Gov[ernment] could not understand that what the Anarchists wanted was the exact opposite of what the Social Democrats wanted. However that may be, I should entirely concur in his belief that the official repressive system is a hotbed of Anarchy, a view taken by [the liberal Reichstag deputy] Baron [Franz] von Stauffenberg who described Anarchism as a child of the Law of 1878. A remark of that eminent speaker was identical with an opinion frequently advanced in my Reports: ‘the Governments know far less than they formerly did of what is going on in Socialist circles – they know absolutely nothing’.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/37.

George Strachey to Marquis of Salisbury, No. 3, Dresden (January 7, 1887)

*Saxony's war minister believes that the “Septennat” – by which army budgets were set for seven-year periods, and over which Bismarck and the Reichstag were in conflict at this time – should ideally be extended to twelve years. If, on the other hand, parliament were to reduce it to five years, General Fabrice sees this as a victory of Social Democracy.*¹⁴⁵

The alleged German horror of ‘the blood-tax’ is a chimera of foreign imaginations, and the 41,000 men called for are not generally thought to be an excessive addition to the peace effective. But the renewed requirement to the Reichstag, to surrender nearly half of its budget right for seven years, arouses opposition, especially when it is enforced by an

144 Henry M. Hyndman (1842–1921) was a founder of Britain's Social Democratic Federation in 1881. John E. Williams (ca. 1854–1917) was a British socialist activist and one of Hyndman's supporters. Williams devoted much of his time to organizing unemployed workers and making speeches on street corners.

145 On veiled threats that Bismarck, in the face of obstruction from the Reichstag, would “take away that bauble” – universal manhood suffrage – see Strachey's report immediately below.

appeal to the Emperor's wishes, and Count [Helmuth von] Moltke's wisdom, as the proper rules for parliamentary conduct. Count [Alfred von] Fabrice, whose impatience of constitutional control is probably less acute than that of General Bronsart,¹⁴⁶ gravely tells me that the Septennate ought in reason to be extended to a twelve-year term, and that if it is reduced to five years, "the revolutionary party" will have triumphed. A compromise in that sense would, however, satisfy reasonable men of all parties, and it is a solution which many expect to be attained.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/171.

**George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 9, Dresden
(January 28, 1887)**

Bismarck is hinting that if he doesn't get his way over the Army Bill, he will unleash a coup d'état against the Reichstag, universal manhood suffrage ("that bauble"), and the constitution.

In reply to Herr Windhorst [*sic*]¹⁴⁷ in the Prussian Landtag, Prince Bismarck repelled, as a mere calumny of the opposition, the idea that if the new Parliament did not give a majority for the military Septennate, the Imperial Government would abrogate the Electoral Law, and, in violation of the Constitution, order fresh elections on an arbitrary basis.

...

Insinuations that Prince Bismarck would have to "take away that bauble" were frequent in the "Reptile" press: I spoke to many Conservatives on the subject, and the reply in every case was 'There will be a Charte Octroyée,¹⁴⁸ and a Reichstag will be elected which will pass the Army Bills, and Bismarck's other favorite measures.' Their belief is universal, that the Reichskanzler would be troubled by no doubts or scruples, and it is questionable if his recent parliamentary professions of constitutional orthodoxy will alter their conviction.

...

146 General Paul Bronsart von Schellendorf (1832–91), Prussian minister of war from 1883 to 1889.

147 Ludwig Windthorst (1812–91), leader of the German Centre Party (*Deutsche Zentrumspartei*) – which represented mainly Catholic interests.

148 Referring to *La Charte Octroyée*, which established a constitutional monarchy in France in 1814.

The alacrity of the Conservatives in attributing to the Prince such nefarious designs, arises to a great extent from their own sympathy with the reactionary programme which they suppose him to entertain.

I am personally unable to see that, because a Minister has not the constitutional morals of Sir R. [Robert] Peel, or [William] Pitt, or [Robert] Walpole, he is capable of proposing to the 25 German Governments schemes more infamous than the publication of the Ordinances of July.¹⁴⁹ It is true that a German Polignac¹⁵⁰ would be encouraged by the knowledge that there is in the Empire no Thiers,¹⁵¹ no 'National', and that if the existing institutions were subverted, hardly a word would be uttered, and not a shot fired, in their defence.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/171.*

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 15, Dresden (February 11, 1887)

This lengthy report attempts to explain the parties and party groupings contesting the Reichstag elections held on February 21, 1887. Bismarck has had Kaiser Wilhelm I dissolve the national parliament and call a snap election in the hope of finding a majority to pass his Army Bill, which he claims is necessary to counter a French threat.

Although according to local judgments the constituencies are full of unusual excitement, there are no visible traces of the effervescence which accompanies a general election in England. The few meetings which are held attract little attention, the addresses and speeches of the candidates, and their prospects, are not, as with us, the topics of the day: while canvassing is principally accomplished by circulars, or by newspaper advertisements emanating from the respective committees.

The distinctive feature of the Saxon electorate is the predominance of the vote at the two extremes of the political scale. For reasons proper to Germany, the middle parties have been displaced by the Conservatives on one side, and the Social Democrats on the other. In 1884, Saxony sent

149 A series of repressive decrees by Charles X in France, which led to the July Revolution of 1830 and his subsequent abdication.

150 Jules de Polignac was an ultra-royalist French statesman who served Charles X just before the 1830 revolution.

151 Adolphe Thiers was a key figure in the French revolutions of 1830 and 1848; he led the suppression of the Paris Commune in spring 1871 and was elected first president of the Third Republic in August 1871.

nearly double as many Conservatives to the Imperial Parliament as in 1871. The forces of Social Democracy were, roughly speaking, tripled between the dates named; the National Liberals, and the Fortschritt, (who correspond with the present ‘freisinnige’),¹⁵² dwindled to half their original strength.

At the last general election (1884), the aggregate poll of the Social Democrats in this kingdom exceeded that of the two Conservative fractions taken together; but, owing to the coalitions formed against them by the parties of order, they did not secure a corresponding number of seats. With *scrutin de liste*¹⁵³ they might have carried nearly the entire representation: The Social Democrats have flourished under proscription, persecution, and intimidation, and the fact that [August] Bebel, and some of their other leaders, are now in prison, does not seem to be affecting that wonderful organization of which the police of Germany have been for eight years fruitlessly trying to discover the secret. They have set up a candidate in each of the 23 parliamentary districts of the Kingdom, and though their hands are so tightly tied by the repressive law of 1878 (which, however, in Saxony at least, is leniently interpreted at election times) they are carrying on a more efficient propaganda than any other party. By way of contributing to the extinction of the Social Democrats, the ‘respectable’ press says little of their proceedings; but there are signs of their being disposed, in certain eventualities, to support ‘freisinnige’ candidates. It would be the crown of Prince Bismarck[’]s peculiar system of parliamentary tactics, if he were to drive Bebel into alliance with Herr [Eugen] Richter.

The separation of the Conservatives into ‘Deutsch’ and ‘frei’ – (also called ‘Reichspartei’ and ‘Ambassador-fraction’) – is a Prussian rather than a Saxon distinction: it is however customary to speak of these groups. Saxony has very few ‘Junkers’ of the malignant Prussian type; a leading land-owner has been talking of the necessity of a ‘strong monarchy’, which with him is euphemistic for despotism; but this is exceptional. I do not believe that the average Saxon Conservatives desire political legislation more retrograde than, for instance, the following: – abolition of universal suffrage: longer electoral periods: further restrictions on the press: a good muzzle-law for the Imperial Parliament: a sterner handling of Social Democracy, and the extension of the repressive law of 1878 to the ‘freisinnig’ party: revival of guilds: restriction on the ‘Golden

152 Strachey is referring to the former German Progressive Party and the (post-1884) German Radical Party.

153 The principle of proportional representation, as used in France at this time.

International' of Jews: increased protection (especially for cereals); a wool duty; and so forth.

The Conservatives have at present to dilute their programme, so as to suit it to the requirements of their alliance with the National Liberals against the 'freisinnig' party. I give the quintessence of their appeals to the constituencies in their own words: "on the issue of the elections hang peace and war": – "shall the German Army remain the Kaiser's Army, or is it to sink to the level of a parliamentary Army, and be the playball of parties"?

The National Liberals have been accused, as in the rest of the Empire, of blowing neither hot nor cold. A special local ground for their disfavor has been, the suspicion that they were disposed to be too pliant instruments in Prince Bismarck's hands, in particular with regard to the railway and tobacco schemes, which were highly obnoxious to Saxony. Their proportional poll in 1884 was very low:¹⁵⁴ their only strong positions are Chemnitz and Leipzig. The pith of their electoral addresses is that the opposition refused the means for the proper defence of the Empire, and that the representatives of the people should be guided by the wisdom of Prince Bismarck and the military experts. "A victory of the opposition would bring upon us a war with all its horrors and losses." They also utilize Herr [Johannes] Miquel's argument from the 'sadness of the Kaiser's heart', which will be turned to joy if a new Reichstag passes the Septennat. The National Liberal candidates are pledging themselves (on account of the suspicious company which they are, in some cases, keeping) to resist illegal tamperings with the constitution, monopolies, and the like. I have no doubt that many of them would be faithful to this undertaking for a certain time. The 'freisinnige' [left-liberal Radicals] of Saxony are weak, but their polls at the last election did not indicate any diminution of their previous strength. There are now signs of a split, of which, however, nothing definite can be said at present....

Leaving to the public judgment the charge that they are "masked republicans" and doctrinaires, the 'freisinnig' candidates dismiss, as an aberration of reason, the cry of their opponents that the fate of Europe depends on the German Reichstag elections: The domestic question of 'three years versus seven' is, they argue, totally irrelevant to the international controversies which involve peace or war. Denouncing the trick imputed to Prince Bismarck, or his satellites, of alarming the country

154 In 1884 the National Liberals won only 17.7 per cent of the popular vote in Saxony, well behind the SPD's 35.3 per cent and the combined Conservative parties' 34.5 per cent. As [table 9](#) shows, the National Liberals were the big winners in 1887, increasing their Saxon Reichstag seats over 1884 from three to ten.

with war scares, they contend that the Reichstag, while granting the men demanded, must not surrender the power of the purse for a period of more than three years.

The relative strength of the four parties named, both in Saxony and the Empire, is visible from the following figures, which show in percentages the proportion between the local votes of 1884 and the aggregate German polls[:]¹⁵⁵

	<u>Saxony</u>	<u>Germany</u>
Social Democrats	30	10
Conservatives	29	16
National Liberals	17	17
Freisinnig	12	18

The five remaining political fractions of Germany are not represented in this Kingdom.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/171.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 16, Dresden (February 18, 1887)

The struggle to represent Dresden in the Reichstag again figures prominently in Strachey's reports on the upcoming Reichstag elections. August Bebel's rivals and their political programs are described in detail. Strachey does not have positive words for them, but neither does he foresee that Bebel and every other SPD candidate in Saxony would suffer defeat in 1887.

The electoral specialty of this kingdom, is the predominance of the extreme right and left. This antagonism is strikingly typified in the capital, where the contest is always between the Social-Democrats and the parties of "order".

Dresden (Altstadt) used to be in the hands of the predecessors of the 'freisinnig' party (the old Fortschritt.) But Bebel having obtained the seat in 1877, the Conservatives and Liberals subsequently combined against him, and in 1881 and 1884, a 'compromise' candidate was elected in his place at the casting [run-off] poll.

155 See [table 9](#) for more accurate figures for Saxony and the Reich.

Bebel is again a candidate, and his prospects are probably improved by his detention in jail. German statesmen fail to see it, but Social-Democracy is not to be extinguished by a little terrorism, or a few philanthropic laws, and the imprisonment of Bebel for unproved participation in an alleged Socialist propaganda is calculated to stimulate his partizans to an unusual electoral effort. Their political life being, perforce, subterranean [sic], no reliable estimates can be made of their present strength, and they are unusually silent as regards lectures and manifestoes.

In the Parliament just dissolved, Dresden (Altstadt) was represented by [Gustav] Hartwig, a 'reformer' – (a term nearly equivalent to 'anti-Semite', and generally indicative of the profession of a specially groveling form of reactionary German belief). This personage is a questionable second-class speculating builder, whose acceptance by the respectable Conservatism of the city is due to the difficulty, generally experienced in Germany, of finding candidates of substance & capacity willing to accept an office which entails expense, and brings very little of the prestige attending in England, France, Hungary, or other countries, to the parliamentary functions.

Besides professing the usual 'Christian-Socialist' creed, Hartwig is now inveighing against the system of Parliamentary Government, 'which throws power into the hands of a fluctuating majority and would undermine the safety and fixity of our political development.'

The 'cartel' of the Conservatives and National-Liberals prescribes that their sitting members of 1884–1887 are to receive the poll of the united parties against a Socialist or 'freisinnig' candidate. The natural reluctance of a portion of the right wing of the Dresden constituency to see their programme advocated in a base Anti-Semitic and 'reforming' edition, has led to a schism, and to a break of the cartel.

The President of the local Chamber of Commerce, Hultzsch [sic],¹⁵⁶ has been induced to contest the seat with Hartwig. The President, who is not a politician, was very reluctant to stand, and his prospects would be nil if he did not face in both directions, or rather in three. Hultzsch thinks, or says, that the Reichstag refused to augment the army, while the hereditary foe is menacing the frontiers. Then comes what may be called the German version of the idea of the 'G.O.M'. [Grand Old Man]. "To the pressing demands of our Kaiser, who is 90 years old, or our grand Reichskanzler, and of the great specialist who is our battle-leader [Helmuth von Moltke], party chiefs blinded by the lust of dominion

156 Theodor Hultzs (1831–1904) was a businessman, banker, and municipal councillor in Dresden. He represented Dresden-Altstadt in the Reichstag 1887–93 for the German Conservatives.

have set themselves in opposition.” Hultzsch is somewhat equivocal as regards protection, saying that there should be customs-duties, but that they should not be too high. The handworkers¹⁵⁷ of Dresden are to be helped against absorption by industry on the large scale; the benefits of the new insurance acts are lauded; the condition of the *artizans* [workers] is to be bettered and they are invited to rally round their natural flag, the conservative.

When ‘*freisinnige*’ vote in the same lobby as clericals and Social-Democrats, an infamous and treacherous coalition takes place. When conservatives of all grades unite with National-Liberals, it is a meritorious and patriotic alliance! Conformably to the ‘cartel’, the Dresden National-Liberals have no separate candidate, and they can support Hartwig or Hultzsch [*sic*] at choice. Not going quite so far in caricature as the South German question – “is a Hohenzollern or the Editor of the ‘*freisinnig*’ journal to reign in Berlin?” – they announce as their ground principle “firm attachment to the Kaiser and Reich”, & denounce the “refusal to augment the army,” protesting that their party will stand aloof if any attempt is made to tamper with the constitution of the Empire, to introduce monopolies, or the like.

As a specimen of the style in which the Bismarckian press is stating the issues before the electorate, I may take the following: – “the whole future of Germany will be influenced by the result of the elections: – according as the votes are given, peace will be secured to our country and Europe, or we shall drift into war.”

The ‘*freisinnige*’, who are confined to the trading and professional classes, and are weak in Dresden, have set up a somewhat obscure member of the municipality, who is an hotel keeper, as their candidate. [Gustav] Lipke and his committee contend that the real object of the dissolution was not the augmentation of the army, but the return of a servile parliament having no independent will, and ready to adopt without discussion, the Reichskanzler’s reactionary schemes in politics and finance, the railway and tobacco monopolies included – both so obnoxious to this kingdom. Yet it is characteristic of the party, that they criticize the condescensions of the Imperial Government to Russia, and denounce that power, not France, as the enemy which endangers the peace and civilization of Europe. The Dresden ‘*Nachrichten*’ describes the arguments of the above quoted programme as constituting a defamatory libel on the Imperial Government. During the recent debates I noted the following remark in one of Prince Bismarck’s speeches. “If we dissolve, it is not on

157 Strachey means *Handwerker* (artisans, craftsmen), who belonged to the lower-middle classes (*Mittelstand*).

account of the question of time [length of military service], but for the principle whether the Reich is to be defended by an Imperial or a Parliamentary army.”

As was explained above, the ‘reformer’ Hartwig, like his predecessor, owed his seat to a vigorous coalition of the three parties of ‘order’ against Bebel. On the 21st Instant the latter will presumably head the poll. At the casting [run-off] election he may almost obtain the absolute majority, if the ‘freisinnig’ vote is withdrawn, as now arranged, from the surviving conservative candidate. There is a fragment of a Catholic constituency in Dresden. They have had a meeting, at which the Pope’s advocacy of the Septennate was repudiated, and the decision taken, under no circumstances to oppose the ‘freisinnig’ candidate – probably a euphemism for ‘vote for Bebel’.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/171.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 17, Dresden (February 18, 1887)

Strachey reports that Saxony’s interior minister has contributed to the effort of pro-Bismarckian parties in Saxony to refute a false election claim put about by the left-wing opposition parties (Social Democrats, Progressives, and Radicals). Bismarck called the snap election to forge a majority in the Reichstag that would approve an Army Bill designed to provide secure funding for a period of seven years (the “Septennat”). The opposition tried to convince voters that Bismarck really wanted to increase their conscripted “years of active service with the colours” from just over two years to seven years.

Some years since, the Minister of the Interior¹⁵⁸ replying to a question of mine – was he putting pressure on the constituencies? – replied that in Saxony no Government dared to do this; “not even Baron Beust”¹⁵⁹ had been charged with such practises. His Excellency yesterday issued what is virtually an electioneering placard. He states, with the usual Teutonic amplitude of style, that whereas “by a reprehensible agitation and

158 Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz.

159 Baron Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust (1809–86), Saxon and Austrian diplomat and statesman. Beust was Saxon foreign minister and de facto government leader (1849–66) and renowned for his repression of liberals and socialists, including a famous “black book” listing alleged enemies of the state.

erroneous comments”, the idea has been disseminated that ‘Septennate’ signifies Seven years active service with the colours (instead of 2 ¼ years as now), the Department of the Interior makes known, that the sole point for the decision of the new Reichstag is this – ‘shall the military augmentation be voted for seven years certain?’

Herr von Nostitz is, judged by our standards, a narrow minded statesman, but he would not lightly put his name to the charge on which his Circular is based.¹⁶⁰ The ‘freisinnig’ ‘Zeitung’¹⁶¹ remarks, however, with truth, that the ‘Reptiles’¹⁶² have been repeatedly challenged, but in vain, to give chapter and verse for their allegation that the opposition has been explaining the Septennate to mean ‘seven years with the colours’. In this Empire, a Ministerial Circular must be delicately handled, if the critic wishes to escape half a dozen actions for libel; but the ‘Zeitung’ is courageous and rash enough to observe, that the accusation has been trumped up by the so-called ‘patriotic’ coalition, and propagated by the ‘Reptile’ press as an effective electioneering lie. Looking to the high educational standard attained in this Kingdom – to the fact that the classes with the lowest degree of political instruction principally read Conservative newspapers – and to the practical knowledge of military topics possessed by every German family – it is altogether improbable that the opposition would attempt to impose on the electorate in the gross manner supposed.

The Ministerial Manifesto is in the modest form of a rectification, and no hint is given how a patriotic elector ought to vote. Still, authoritative commentary is suggestion veiled, and, in a country where servility is so rampant, this placard cannot fail to stimulate the civil servants of all grades, clergy, schoolmasters, and the like, to work against the opposition candidates. I have no doubt that the Circular which bears the signature of Herr von Nostitz will turn out to be, in substance and initiative, a Prussian concoction, and that it is the substitute for the Imperial proclamation of which so much has been lately said.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/171.*

160 Another reason Nostitz-Wallwitz would not be inclined to add his signature to obvious election propaganda is that the election of candidates was regularly protested, investigated, and sometimes overturned if it contravened an important provision in the German electoral law, namely the prohibition against civil servants endorsing a parliamentary candidate in their official capacity as a servant of the state. See Anderson, *Practicing Democracy*.

161 The Radical Party’s *Dresdner Zeitung*, in an article dated February 18, 1887.

162 Newspapers that are part of Bismarck’s “reptile press.”

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 18, Dresden
(February 22, 1887)

The British envoy is nothing if not blunt when, in the first line of his report, he demolishes the idea of a free press in Germany. He notes that August Bebel will enter a run-off contest for Dresden's Reichstag seat. The SPD vote has risen 6 per cent over 1884, but voter turnout has also increased substantially, and Bebel's chances of victory are slim.

The half-enslaved press of this country does not shine at Election times. Although most of the Saxon polls were known last night, to day the papers only publish chaotic lists of figures without a word of commentary or comparison, from which readers must extract what results they may.

As far as I can judge by my own unguided lights, the present elections are characterized by a very large augmentation of the allied Conservative and National-Liberal poll. This, however, is not due to a displacement of political strength, but to increased electoral energy amongst the (self-called) 'patriotic' parties.

For instance, in Leipzig County, the candidate of the right obtained in 1884 only 9,300 votes against 17,300 yesterday. The reinforcement has dropped, so to speak, from the sky; for the opposing poll, that of the Social-Democrat, has grown from 14,300 to 16,800.

In Dresden, the process has been similar. Yesterday the poll of the leading Conservative ('compromise'), [Theodor] Hultzsch, was larger than that obtained by the two candidates of the right in 1884. Nevertheless, the Social-Democratic vote has augmented since the last general election by about 6 per cent, and the loss by the 'freisinnig' [Radical] party is only 280.

The figures are:

[1887]		(1884)	
[Theodor] Hultzsch (cons.)	14,949	the conserv[ative]	
[Gustav] Hartwig (anti-sem.)	4,689	candidates	14,621
[Gustav] Lipke (freissinig) ¹⁶³	1,110	freisinnig.	1,379
[August] Bebel (Soc. Dem.)	9,177	Bebel	8,620

Therefore Bebel did not obtain his usual relative majority, the reasons being – the additions to the wealthier portion of the electorate, consequent on the growth of the city, and increased energy among his old

163 Presumably Gustav Lipke (1820–89), a Berlin lawyer and father-in-law of Alfred von Tirpitz. Along with Heinrich Rickert he was a leading figure, after 1880, of the Liberale Vereinigung.

opponents of the right. The above figures being what they are, it seems absurd that there should be a second election, at which, looking to past experience, Bebel would only add from 1500 to 2500 to yesterday's score.

As far as can be seen from the incomplete data available, the Social Democrats have lost some of their old seats, although their polls have, in places, augmented. Of the results to the other parties nothing positive can be said to day.

Very effective pressure has been exercised on the Dresden constituency by the enclosed map, which is an electoral 'leaflet' of the South German National-Liberals ('deutsche Partei'). The figures are, on the whole arithmetic, but, as suits the map['s] sensational function, there is something of the *suggestio falsi*¹⁶⁴ in, for instance, the comparison of the budget strength of the French Army with the actual German peace-footing.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/171.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 19, Dresden (February 23, 1887)

See [table 9](#), below, for what Strachey refers to as a "mere electioneering incident" – by which he means that the election result in 1887 is a blip, a temporary interruption, in the SPD's long-term rise. A nationalist election campaign centrally focused on a war scare decimated the Social Democrats' representation in the Reichstag, cutting their numbers by more than half (from twenty-four to eleven). The table shows that the rout was particularly extreme in what had been one of Social Democracy's regions of greatest strength – Saxony. The party's Saxon contingent in the Reichstag stood at five after the 1884 election, but after February 1887 not a single Social Democratic deputy represented Saxony in Berlin. As Strachey notes, this was a source of immense "satisfaction and pride" for the anti-socialist parties.¹⁶⁵

The complete (provisional) returns for the Saxon elections were known last night. The augmentation of the polls of the right, which I have

¹⁶⁴ False representation.

¹⁶⁵ For colour maps showing the winning parties and their opposition in each Saxon constituency in 1887, and the "party bastions," see [map S.5.1](#) and [map S.5.2](#) in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*. All eighteen "party bastions" were won by a Conservative or a National Liberal.

reported from Dresden, has been still more marked in the provinces, the 'patriotic' vote having, in some places, doubled or more, since 1884.

In the last Reichstag, the Kingdom was represented by 13 'patriotic', and 10 opposition members (six Social-Democrats and 4 freisinnige). Of these 23 seats 21 have now been taken by Conservatives and National-Liberals. According to present calculations, there will be two casting [run-off] elections, (one for Dresden), at which the chances are in favor of the coalition. It is therefore possible that the entire opposition will be wiped away.

The satisfaction and pride with which the victorious parties, and, above all, the Government regard this result is considerably damped by the fact that the extinction of Social-Democracy in the parliamentary representation of Saxony is a mere electioneering incident, the poll of the adherents of Bebel and Liebknecht having augmented fully 25 percent since the last appeal (1884) to the constituencies of the Kingdom.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/171.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 20, Dresden (March 4, 1887)

The final results from the Reichstag election are in. Although Social Democrats did not win a single seat in Saxony, Strachey believes the movement will continue to grow as a result of the "menaces, visitations, arrests, punishments, and expulsions" it is subjected to.

Although it was obvious that at the casting [run-off] election for Dresden the Conservatives must overwhelm [August] Bebel, even if the 'freisinnige' [Radicals] polled in his favour, as well as the residue of the constituency which had not voted at all on the 21st Ultimo, the "patriotic" committees have been as indefatigable in their efforts for [Theodor] Hultzs, as if his return hung on a hair.

The system of the 'absolute' majority – under which if no candidate receives more than half of all the votes recorded, there is a casting election (Stichwahl) – is considered by German Conservatives to operate strongly in their own favour. They say that it is in the political nature of Liberals of all grades to poll with enthusiasm at once, so as to exhaust their electoral strength at the first trial. Whereas the Conservatives are a passive party, and their torpidity can seldom be quite overcome except under the stimulus of a second election.

Table 9. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1884 and 1887

	October 28, 1884			February 21, 1887		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
Saxony						
German Conservatives	82,353	22.7	8	124,586	24.0	8
Free Conservatives	42,572	11.8	3	53,931	10.4	4
National Liberals	64,316	17.7	3	161,348	31.1	10
Progressives, Radicals	44,246	12.2	4	29,873	5.7	1
Antisemites	—	0.0	0	—	0.0	0
Social Democrats	128,142	35.3	5	149,270	28.7	0
Total votes cast / seats	364,602		23	522,025		23
Voter turnout rate (%)	58.5			79.6		
Reich						
German Conservatives	861,063	15.2	78	1,147,200	15.2	80
Free Conservatives	387,687	6.9	28	736,389	9.8	41
National Liberals	997,033	17.6	51	1,677,979	22.2	99
Progressives, Radicals	1,092,895	19.3	74	1,061,922	14.1	32
Antisemites	—	0.0	0	11,593	0.2	1
Social Democrats	549,990	9.7	24	763,128	10.1	11
Total votes cast / seats	5,681,628		397	7,570,710		397
Voter turnout rate (%)	60.6			77.5		

Source: Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 155 (and for explanatory notes).

Note: Some parties have been omitted for the sake of clarity.

On the 21st of February, no side could be charged with indifference [*sic*]; for in Dresden, as in Leipzig, and elsewhere in the Kingdom, the poll was nearly nine tenths of the register.

On that day and yesterday the votes were as follows:

February 21.	[main ballot]	March 2.	[run-off ballot]
Conservatives.	19,637 ¹⁶⁶	Hultzschn.	19,655
Bebel.	9,175	Bebel.	10,081

166 Strachey obviously erred when he wrote here: 19,6337.

Hultzsch is therefore returned, and the supporters of the ‘Anti-Semite’, [Gustav] Hartwig, appear to have voted for him to a man.

The Social-Democratic vote yesterday was somewhat smaller than at the four previous casting elections; but according to officials who profess to have special knowledge of the subject, Bebel received on each of these occasions support from the other parties. There is some truth in this, and I should therefore prefer to estimate his strength from the first polls. These have been

1877 6,940.	1881 9,079.
1878 9,879.	1884 8,620.
	1887 9,175.

In Dresden, then, Social Democracy is only just maintaining its’ former level, while in Leipzig county, for instance, the augmentation has been as portentous as in Berlin.

My English prejudices supply the simple reason. The Leipzig circle [electoral district], like Berlin, is in the enjoyment of the lesser state of siege, and Dresden is not. As the Social-Democratic movement has much of the character of a religious revolution, it stands to reason that menaces, visitations, arrests, punishments, and expulsions, form a propaganda eminently calculated to bring in fresh recruits, and add to the fanaticism of its’ partizans.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/171.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 21, Dresden (March 4, 1887)

As Strachey indicates here – without drawing the larger picture – Saxony’s electoral culture was particularly conflict-ridden because it was polarized between Conservatives and National Liberals on the Right and Social Democrats on the Left. No “buffering” effect was provided either by the Catholic Centre Party (because Saxony was overwhelmingly Protestant) or by the left-liberal parties (Progressives and Radicals), whose weakness was exposed in 1887.

The monotony of the ‘patriotic’ success has been broken by the return of a ‘freisinnig’ [Radical] member at the Zittau ‘Stichwahl’ [run-off election] yesterday. His poll was more than twice as large (10,830 to

5,300) as in 1884, and this augmentation, which is nearly as great as the maximum relative increase of any Septennate candidate's vote elsewhere, may have been partly owing to help from the Social-Democrats, or from the Catholics, who are numerous in the Zittau circle [electoral district].

The 23 elections of the Kingdom are now terminated. The 10 opposition members have shrunk to 1. Instead of 13 Conservatives and National-Liberals, there are now 22 supporters of the Septennate. The Socialists have lost their 6 seats, although their poll has risen from 128,000 in 1884, to nearly 150,000 now. The 'freisinnige' have lost 3 seats out of 4, and the 'reptile' [Bismarckian] press is jubilant at the fact that the most hated of their antagonists have only polled three fourths of their previous strength. The change in the feelings of the constituencies cannot, however, be measured by the alteration in the vote; for the 'freisinnige' like their predecessors the progressists, have at every former election received support from the parties which lately combined against them.

The collapse in the 'freisinnig' parliamentary representation, which has been so much more disastrous here than in the Empire as a whole, is being celebrated by the Conservatives with war-[w]hoops of exaltation, language being used which attains that maximum of ferocity to political opponents, that alacrity in trampling on the defeated, which is so characteristic of the new Germany.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/171.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 57, Dresden (October 25, 1887)

The biennial election of one-third of Saxon Landtag seats has just taken place. The "parties of order" believe their success in the Reichstag elections of February 1887 is having a spillover effect. The British envoy is not so sure, and he explains why (see [tables 3 and 4](#) for details). Between the three partial elections of 1883–7 and those of 1889–93 – by the end of each round, all 80 seats had been contested – the total number of votes cast for SPD candidates more than doubled, from about 32,000 votes to almost 75,000 votes. This despite the three-mark tax threshold for enfranchisement. Over the same period, the SPD's share of the overall vote rose from 20.2 to 31.1 per cent – still far less than the Conservative Party's share (40.2 per cent), but the trend was clear and (for the "parties of order") "portentous."

The local Legislature [*Landtag*] of Saxony meets next month for its biennial session, and the prescribed renewal of one third of the members of the Landtag, or Lower House, has just taken place. The result is, in a sense, favorable to the Government and the parties 'of order', for the constituencies have proved to be still under the influence of the Conservative reaction aroused last February at the dissolution of the German Parliament. The Conservatives and National-Liberals, supported in some instances by the Progressists, have worked together, thus securing considerable majorities for the candidates of the coalition, while the Social-Democrats have only carried the single seat (of the 21 [seats contested]) which they held before. This has given rise to excessive official and 'patriotic' jubilation which, however, the arithmetic of the facts shews to be mere 'dancing on a volcano'. The last appeals to the constituencies in question were in 1881, and a comparison between that year and this shews that the power of Social-Democracy has been growing at a portentous rate. I find that the combined Saxon vote of the parties 'of order' is now one third greater than it was in 1881: the Socialist vote is five times greater. [August] Bebel has hitherto sat in the Landtag for one of the Leipsic circles: this year three parties combined to oust him; but, though mustering double the old minority poll, [they] were defeated by Bebel, whose supporters had, since 1881, been tripled.

In the city of Leipsic, and in Dresden, the dislocation of party strength has been similar to this, and in no one Saxon electoral district has the Socialist vote diminished.

These facts are the more significant, as in Saxony the enjoyment of the local [*Landtag*] parliamentary franchise is contingent on a certain property qualification, which probably deprives half the operatives [i.e., workers] of the kingdom of the suffrage.¹⁶⁷ But such considerations do not deter the [Bismarckian] 'reptile-press', and its official inspirers, here and elsewhere in Germany, from quoting the Saxon elections as a splendid victory on the side of order – or stop the reiteration of the assurance that, thanks to Prince Bismarck's wise repressive Bill of 1878, and the beneficent measures of State Socialism now in process of inauguration, the force of German Social-Democracy is being gradually broken.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/171.

167 Roughly 14 per cent of the entire Saxon population – and only men – had the vote around this time, compared to about 22 per cent for Reichstag elections.



Figure 17. Police dissolution of a workers' election rally in Berlin, 1890. This image was carefully composed to reassure middle-class readers of the *Illustrirte Zeitung* that the German authoritarian state had matters safely in hand. The workers are sitting dutifully at their tables, while the imposing figure of a police officer towers above them and gives them orders to vacate the premises. The leaders of the rally at right appear passive and resigned. In short, the image – which was published on August Bebel's fiftieth birthday – does not convey fear of revolution.

Source: "Polizeiliche Auflösung einer Arbeiter-Wahlversammlung in Berlin," woodcut by Friedrich Willig, *Illustrirte Zeitung* (Leipzig), Bd. 94, Nr. 2434 (February 22, 1890), 179.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 7, Dresden (February 2, 1888)

The impending renewal of the Anti-Socialist Law for another two years prompts Strachey to unleash a flood of criticism on Germans who are willing to "be permanently kept under the gag of an exceptional law." Bismarck's colossal mistake in reverting to such overt repression, he concludes, has added greatly to the success of socialist propaganda emanating from Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel.

No one who attaches precise meanings to words would speak of a German ‘public opinion’ on the Bill against Social-Democracy; but I may say that the feeling is probably in favor of a simple renewal of the existing law.

The independent press of all parties denounces the banishment clause as theoretically indefensible, and as calculated to aggravate class hatreds, and to turn agitators into martyrs. Doubts are expressed whether, in a country with the advanced political civilisation of Germany, a minority can be permanently kept under the gag of an exceptional law. While the question is raised, if there are, in fact, any visible signs of that efficacy in repressing Social-Democracy which persons in office profess to discover in the present system of proscription.

The mental servitude which is the mark of all Germans in public employments makes it impossible to allow any weight whatever to their views. Their rule is, to “say ditto to M^r. Burke” as often and as loudly as possible. All of them profess belief in coercion, as being itself an admirable instrument of Government, and they declare in chorus that its results have, in the present case, been excellent. When the objection is raised, that under the law of 1878 the proscribed party has grown portentously in numbers and vigor, the reply is vaguely made that but for repression things would have been worse.

The Germans have little of our repugnance to silencing & persecuting obnoxious minorities, and far from persons of average enlightenment being unfavorable to the imposition of the restraints in question, there are many who would like the law against Social-Democracy to be extended so as to reach the left wing of the liberal party. I have no doubt that a plebiscite taken in Dresden would give a strong vote in favor of the banishment clause: according to an opinion given me by the President¹⁶⁸ of the lower house of the Saxon legislature, a majority of that body would possibly be on the same side. However, the head Burgomaster of the city [Alfred Stübel], who may be called a National-Liberal, considers that moderate men disapprove the idea of expatriation.

The general subject has been frequently illustrated in detail by the facts and figures given in my correspondence. These new discussions have confirmed me in my belief that the propaganda of Bebel and Liebknecht has had an active auxiliary in Prince Bismarck.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/173.*

168 Daniel Ferdinand *Ludwig* Haberkorn (1811–1901), a leading member of the State Association (*Landesverein*) of Saxon Conservatives.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 46 (October 18, 1889)

For the Saxon Landtag elections just concluded,¹⁶⁹ Social Democratic agitation could only be subterranean. When the results were announced, the “parties of order” again cried victory. But the number of votes for SPD candidates in certain electoral districts has increased greatly over the last elections in the same districts (1883). The party is also making inroads in relatively unindustrialized parts of Saxony – another cause for worry among socialism’s enemies. In this report, despite describing Social Democracy as representing the “red republic” and the Paris Commune, Strachey tells the Foreign Office in London that SPD gains in a German state parliament, not only in the Reichstag, provide firm proof that coercion and repression are contributing to Social Democracy’s growth.

Previous to the [Saxon *Landtag*] elections, such parliamentary agitation as the lukewarm political temperaments of Germany can sustain was put in scene. In Dresden, for instance, there was a little canvassing for the ‘Cartel’, or joint party ‘of order’, two or three meetings of electors, a few newspaper articles, placards inviting support for ‘throne and altar’, against Social-Democracy and its malignant ‘crypto-republican’ ally the ‘freisinnig’ [Radical] faction. The preparations of the followers of [August] Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht were necessarily somewhat subterranean. Their press is extinguished, and, if they address their friends in public, the Commisary of police gags the speaker at the first audible words of disparagement of official beliefs, policy, or persons, or, perhaps, summarily closes the assemblage.

When the results of the polls were reported, some of the Bismarckite organs spoke as if a great victory had been won all along the line by the parties of ‘order’. The fact was quite otherwise. The ‘signature’ of the day was a large accession to the Social Democratic vote, with a serious subtraction, in places, from the absolute or relative strength of the ‘Cartel’.

In Dresden, the aggregate poll of the coalition candidates in the three contested districts shewed an augmentation, compared with 1883, of 15 per cent.¹⁷⁰ The parallel advance of Social Democracy was 30 per cent. In one district the ‘Cartel’ candidate,¹⁷¹ a popular member of the

169 The poll was on October 15, 1889.

170 Every two years, one-third of the *Landtag* deputies stood for election, but winners were elected for a six-year term. Hence, 1883 was the last time these particular electoral districts had been contested.

171 Paul Schickert (1827–1905), a retired *Finanzrat* and city councillor in Dresden, sat in the lower chamber of the *Landtag* from 1889 to 1895 for the Conservatives.

municipality[,] was warmly supported by the Conservatives, National Liberals, Progressists and 'Christian Socialists'. His poll was 25 per cent larger than the patriotic vote in 1883, while the poll of Social Democracy had nearly doubled. In these circumstances the Dresden 'Anzeiger' discerned "a proof that in the hearts of our population love and fidelity to Kaiser and Reich, to King and Fatherland, with Law and Order, are still as living realities as before." Of the following polls the arithmetic requires no comment.

	Polls	1883	1889
Leipzig 2nd district	National Liberal	1358	3323
	Socialist	305	2379
Leipzig 3rd district	Cartel	3949	4230
	Socialist	1492	7900
Chemnitz	Cartel	1181	2130
	Socialist	2523	4088
Chemnitz county	Cartel	1185	1465
	Socialist	570	1569
Stollberg	Conservative	2321	2127
	Socialist	1688	2235

In other electoral districts the gains of the Social Democrats were less marked, in a few there was some decline. But most of the polls told the same story, the progress of Social Democracy being[,] moreover, visible in constituencies where the industrial population is a relative minimum, which was not so before.

The dislocation of parliamentary strength at these 27 elections was not important. The Social Democrats maintained one severely contested seat, and gained two, thereby raising their contingent in the Landtag from five to seven members. The single 'freisinnig' member was re-elected in the face of a vigorous and unscrupulous opposition, and that party, which seemed to be almost extinct in Saxony, otherwise shewed signs of active rejuvenescence. The Saxon Progressists, still so called, who have apostasized from their old creed, lost two seats out of four.

Looking to the fifteen cases where the Social Democrats contested seats, I find the following figures.

	Votes
Poll of coalesced party of 'Order'	25,040
Poll of Social Democracy	76,477

I must remark that this great minority is representative, not of ‘Her Majesty’s Opposition’, but of the red republic and the [Paris] commune.¹⁷² As the political majority, untaught by the portentous consequences of their attempt to stifle ideas by Act of Parliament, and by the failure of recent Social legislation¹⁷³ to mitigate, in the smallest particular, the enthusiasm and resentment of a highly intelligent and fanatical party, or otherwise to act as a sop in the way expected, is favorable to the contemplated renewal of the repressive system, it is satisfactory to think that the dispositions of the army are excellent, the troops being ‘ready to fire on their fathers’. The promised fruits of the mixed method of coercion and seduction, so confidently announced as being on the verge of appearance, may, of course, shortly become visible. Those who have to deal with practical politics & who, like myself, do not easily pass from facts to speculation, must be content to say that in Saxony, the centre of German industrial gravity, and especially in Chemnitz – the Manchester of the Empire – the phantom of Social Democracy never yet shewed in the proportions to which it has attained now.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/174.*

**George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 50
(November 8, 1889)**

The Saxon minister of war thinks the Anti-Socialist Law remains popular in Saxony. He is nevertheless critical of §28, which allows local authorities to impose the “Minor State of Siege” on a city and its environs and to expel Social Democrats living there to another part of Germany.

Yesterday I observed to [Minister of War] Count [Alfred von] Fabrice, that there was nothing of interest at present on the German political horizon except the [extension of the] Social Democracy law, and I asked what he thought of the prospects of that measure. His Excellency replied that the attendance of members in the Reichstag was just now so scanty, that it was very difficult, even for the heads of the parties on the spot, to foresee how the rank and file would be disposed to vote. The bill had, as I knew, its opponents on political grounds, and its

172 See the earlier note on the Paris Commune of March–May 1871.

173 Strachey refers here to the Imperial Law Concerning Disability and Old-Age Insurance, dated June 22, 1889.



Figure 18. *The Strike*, 1886. In his painting *Der Streik*, artist Robert Koehler (1850–1917) depicts the confrontation between a factory employer (*left, in top hat*) and a group of rebellious workers. Is violence about to erupt? The distance between the elegant brick villa, on whose steps the employer stands, and the factory in the background has been aggressively foreshortened by the artist. This allows Koehler to emphasize the workers who stream out of the factory to come support the shop-floor representative, who, standing on the ground, confronts the factory employer from a position of literal inferiority. The tenseness of the situation is heightened by the figure in the foreground who arms himself with a rock. When this painting was exhibited in the United States in the spring of 1886 it created a sensation. Its exhibition coincided with the culmination of American workers' demands for an eight-hour workday – a national wave of strikes involving about 350,000 workers in over 11,000 enterprises. Efforts to put down these strikes resulted in the Haymarket Massacre in Chicago on May 4, 1886.

Source: bpk Bildagentur / Deutsches Historisches Museum / Photo: Arne Psille / Art Resource, NY.

introduction on the eve of a general election was disliked by many who approved its contents. The feelings of the constituencies were always unfathomable, and the Conservatives, in particular, would be reluctant to place themselves in direct antagonism to a part of the electorate just as the Reichstag was about to close.¹⁷⁴ He should therefore, not be surprised, if an attempt was made to bury the Bill in Committee – (the usual German Parliamentary process when it is desired to get rid of an unpalatable measure by a side wind.) In such case, added His Excellency, the Bill, as it stands, or amended, would be laid before the new Reichstag – and passed.

I asked Count Fabrice if he thought the allied Governments had the sympathies of the public in thus treating the Socialists as a proscribed class. He said that in his opinion, they had, and that the wish for permanent coercion was pretty general. The weak point of the system was, the power of the authorities to require agitators, actual or alleged, to quit proclaimed districts.¹⁷⁵ It was a strong thing to drive from his domicile a man who had not been convicted of an actual offence, and there were many who thought the practise indefensible.

In conversation with the Saxon minister on topics of this sort, I carefully refrain from criticism of his facts and ideas, which frequently require considerable correction to make them conformable to realities. On the German parliamentary situation I can form no opinion. As regards the Bill, I continue in the belief that coercion has augmented both the material and the moral strength of the proscribed party. And I do not doubt that the proposed measure, with its mock concessions, and virtual aggravation of the gag at present fixed on pure opinion, as distinguished from overt acts, will, if it becomes law, bring more converts to Social Democracy than all the efforts and eloquence of [Wilhelm] Liebknecht and [August] Bebel.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/174.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 51, Dresden (November 8, 1889)

In 1889–90, German industry was subject to a wave of strikes, including a large one by miners in the Ruhr. In this report Strachey compares British and German penalties against those who intimidate strike-breakers.

174 Referring to the general Reichstag election scheduled for February, 1890.

175 The “Minor State of Siege” had been imposed on Leipzig and its environs in June 1881; see Strachey’s reports from 1881.

*“Intimidation,” he notes, is recognized in Britain as “part of the inevitable machinery of strikes,” whereas it is treated much more harshly in German courts.*¹⁷⁶

In his recent speech on the Social Democracy Bill,¹⁷⁷ the Socialist [Wilhelm] Liebknecht contrasted the behaviour of our authorities and public to the British workman with the parallel conditions here. He might have added, that while with us intimidation is recognized as part of the inevitable machinery of strikes [text underlined in pencil; note in margin: ‘? often incidental to’], in Germany the question is debated whether combinations for securing higher wages should be allowed at all. Strikes have been of late frequent in Saxony, so that the time seemed to be come for indirect official intervention on behalf of the capitalist class, whose returns are being menaced by the growing call for a better remuneration of labour. Accordingly the Public Prosecutor of Chemnitz¹⁷⁸ – the Manchester of the Kingdom, and the Empire – has issued a notice declaratory of the law on combinations for obtaining higher wages, especially by strikes. Persons inducing or trying to induce others, by physical force, menaces, or publishing names [underlined in pencil], to join any such combination, are liable, on conviction, to three months imprisonment, or more. Those who by similar means, hinder, or try to hinder, manners of such combinations from retiring, are liable to the same penalties. Anyone who, by violence or threats, compels another to acts, or omission of acts, in the above respects, may be sentenced to a year’s imprisonment, with a fine of £30.

In publishing this notice, the representative of the Saxon Minister of Justice¹⁷⁹ refers to certain recent irregularities arising from strikes, and gives warning that every such offence will hereafter be visited with the full rigour of the law.

In a village where a strike occurred, a weaver has recently been sentenced to 10 days imprisonment “for using threatening expressions”. This is all the information the German newspapers would give in such a case, and no one cares to be supplied with accurate knowledge of the circumstances of the offence. The probability is, that the remarks inculcated as “threatening” would strike Your Lordship ... as language perfectly appropriate for the individual and the incident.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/174.*

176 On Strachey’s report, Lord Salisbury wrote, “Mr Strachey does not quite understand the English Law, which does not much differ in principle”; hence the marginal queries cited here.

177 On November 5, 1889, on the first reading of the bill to extend the Anti-Socialist Law of 1878.

178 Christian Julius Schwabe.

179 Christian von Abeken.

PART III

1890–1897

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George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 5, Dresden
(January 24, 1890)

In reporting on the campaign for the Reichstag elections due to take place in February 1890, Strachey notes that Bismarck's social insurance schemes appear to have had little effect in turning German workers away from Social Democracy. So far, reports Strachey, the election campaign is much duller than general elections in Britain, although one has to wonder whether he has his ear close to the ground in Saxon electoral districts outside Dresden.

The torpid political habits of Germany are well illustrated by the fact that, although the General Election to the Reichstag takes place a month from now, no parliamentary agitation has commenced amongst constituencies or candidates. Short newspaper statements indicate the names which will come before the Electorate; or vaguely describe the arrangements of the "parties of order" for securing a repetition of the extraordinary victory of 1887, when the coalition of Conservatives and National-Liberals, reinforced by the 'freisinnig' [Radical] party, unseated, with a single exception, all the independent members of the Saxon contingent to the Reichstag. But although there is a little journalistic writing, the candidates and the electorate are themselves silent. Not an address has been issued, not a meeting has been called, not an indication of a canvass is visible.

A few weeks ago I reported the signal successes of the Social-Democrats at the elections to the Saxon Landtag. The proscribed party has just inflicted another defeat on the triple Bismarckite alliance. In October, one of the urban constituencies rejected a Social Democratic (a local publican) for a Cartel candidate (a manufacturer), who happened to be subsequently unseated. At the new election, the defeated Bebelite made an addition of 40 per cent to his previous poll, and was returned by a large majority. Such incidents afford an instructive comment on the official cant respecting the demulcent influence of the new State Socialism.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/175.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 8, Dresden
(February 7, 1890)

The Reichstag elections are just two weeks away, and finally the Conservative and National Liberal parties are making their election platforms

known. The latter raise the spectre of French aggression and Social Democratic revolutionary action in their appeal to the electorate. The Conservatives' main newspaper, the Dresdner Nachrichten, blames the Jews, not protective tariffs, for the high cost of grain.

Writing in defense of the quinquennial period newly instituted for the German Reichstag,¹ a Bismarckite organ remarks, that the last year of every previous parliament has been as good as fruitless, from the attention of members being engrossed by their preparations for the impending electoral campaign. For Saxony, where the political torpor is not very different from the German average, it is sufficient comment on the above deviation from veracity to say, that before last week scarcely any signs were visible that a general election was at hand.

The polls are a fortnight hence. Not till the day before yesterday did the Saxon National Liberal Union issue their manifesto to the electorate of the Kingdom. The Committee do not shrink from the assertion, that [French] General [Georges] Boulanger's "schemes of war", as revealed on his trial, were based on "the dissensions of Germany" in 1887, when the Reichstag was mastered by a majority of "enemies of the Empire", who refused to provide the means requisite for the defence of the national territory. Of the dangers of that year the recurrence is probable, unless the "parties of order" combine to defeat the eventual machinations of [Eugen] Richter,² [August] Bebel, and [Ludwig] Windthorst,³ against the military septennate.

Another fundamental point of this Address is the necessity of a renewal of the Social-Democracy proscription Act (the expulsion clause is not discussed). The Committee do not fail to repeat the stale Bismarckite fable that the sectaries of Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht are supported by the 'freisinnig' [Radical] Party, who, it appears, have constantly made it their grand object to sow dissension amongst all classes of people. If the "Cartell" of 1887 is effectively renewed by the "supporters of order," Saxony will again be delivered from parliamentary participation in this unnatural coalition, and will contribute to the formation of a loyal and patriotic Reichstag.

The Conservatives have also issued an address, in which the cooperation of the Bismarckite parties is recommended by similar arguments, but in a less abject tone, and with a minimum of misrepresentation.

1 Before 1890, general elections to the Reichstag were scheduled every three years.

2 Leader of the German Radicals; see the earlier note on Richter.

3 See the earlier note on Windthorst; also Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Windthorst* (Oxford, 1981).

The [Dresdner] ‘Nachrichten’ is afraid that votes may be lost in consequence of the rise of prices now in process, and the Editor demonstrates daily that protective duties do not raise the cost of commodities. He now admits that wheat here is fifteen shillings a qua[r]ter dearer than in London, or more than the amount of the German duty. But the tax, he boldly reiterates, though saving the native grower from ruin, has no influence on the grain markets, where the quotations are only affected by the state of the harvests, and by ‘rings’ of radical Jews. As far as I can judge, this political economy is generally accepted as sound.

The liberal party is weak in this kingdom: in Dresden, three years ago, their poll was only some hundred votes. There is a small local survival of old “progressists” who, having mostly Bismarckized, repudiate all connexion with Herr Richter’s few Saxon adherents. In Dresden-Altstadt, both sections support the late cartel member – a colorless politician⁴ – against the candidate of Social Democracy.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/175.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 9, Dresden (February 12, 1890)

Strachey discusses Kaiser Wilhelm II’s decrees of February 4, promising relief for German workers on the basis of international discussion and cooperation. He reports that Saxon public opinion is unimpressed by the Kaiser’s initiative; the leader of Dresden Conservatives finds them “utterly beyond the power of governments to compel,” and municipal authorities believe they will not help to hold back the Social Democratic tide.

When correspondents of the London newspapers talk of the Emperor’s Rescripts [*Erlasse*]⁵ causing “extraordinary excitement” in Germany, they are using language applicable, perhaps, to popular feeling in our impressionable country, but entirely out of place in speaking of the currents of opinion to which political things and ideas give rise in this Empire. The Imperial utterances have been discussed, but in an undemonstrative manner, and the judgments on them which I have read and heard, though

⁴ See the earlier notes on Theodor Hultzsck, first elected in 1887.

⁵ The Kaiser’s *Erlasse* of February 4, 1890. The proclamation addressed to Bismarck demanded the convocation of a European conference on social reform. The second one instructed the Kaiser’s ministers to prepare legislation on social insurance, the regulation of working hours and conditions, and the representation of labour.

complimentary enough with respect to the Emperor's intentions, have been unfavorable to his scheme of an International adjustment of labor problems. In the newspapers, there has been an exuberance of the reverential superlatives approved by German taste when the acts and words of Royalty are debated. A distinguished lecturer⁶ has said in the national hyperbolic style, that the issue of the Rescripts was an event "without parallel in the History of the World". But the conviction has been plainly expressed, that in proposing a labour conference, his Imperial Majesty has wandered into the region of chimaeras.

This view (and I speak after an usual amount of personal enquiry) has been held by high official, parliamentary, municipal, and industrial authorities, of whom I cannot make particular mention in a Dispatch. My result is confirmed by a survey in the ministerial [Dresdner] 'Journal' of the articles of the German press on this topic, which describes the doubts and objections raised by the Rescripts as preponderating over the recognition of their practical utility. I was yesterday informed by the leading 'Cartel' wire-puller of Saxony, who is a Conservative of eminence,⁷ that he and his friends held an effective international settlement of the hours, remuneration, and protection of labour to be utterly beyond the power of Governments to compel. And he added that he should be disposed to ascribe these Imperial dreams to the doctrinaire suggestions of Dr. Hinzpeter.⁸ ~~[The civic authorities] do not expect the announcement of the Emperor's benevolent declarations to turn half a dozen voters at the polls next week. The prevalent impression is that the moment for the issue of the [Erlaße] was very ill chosen, as their appearance at this juncture gives colour to the argument of the Social Democrats that the publication is an electioneering trick.~~⁹

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/175 (final).

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 11, Dresden (February 14, 1890)

The Kaiser's decrees aroused opposition from employers and government officials in Saxony, not only because they reflected the emperor's

6 Not identifiable.

7 Almost certainly Paul Mehnert, chairman of the Dresden Conservative Association. See the note on Mehnert in Strachey's report of November 14, 1890.

8 Georg Ernst Hinzpeter (1827–1907), Kaiser Wilhelm II's childhood tutor and later advisor.

9 In his draft report, Strachey also noted that Dresden's municipal council had posted copies of the Kaiser's proclamation all over town, but they had largely been torn down at night.

impulsive style of decision-making and his wish to be a “social emperor,” but also because their implementation would make German exports less competitive.

I desire to draw attention to a point connected with the Imperial Rescript¹⁰ which proposes an International discussion of the labor question of the day. The Emperor defines his object as being to attain an International agreement to “limit the demand which may be made on the labour of the workers.” The essentials of the problem are: – 1.: a normal work-day: 2: restrictions on the employment of children: 3: prohibitions of Sunday labour.

Now the power of Germany to sustain industrial competition with ourselves, depends entirely (certain specialities excepted), on the following circumstances.

1. The average German work day is 11 hours, while the British work-day is 9 hours, and commands a higher remuneration. 2. The German restrictions on children’s labour are less severe than ours. 3. The same is the case with regard to the observance of Sunday.

It is the existence of these conditions, and others subsidiary, which enables Germany to rival, or undersell, us in the markets of the world. Germany can challenge our industrial supremacy because her workers submit to demands on their labour which our workers will not accept. It is plain, then, that if the demands made on labour here are lowered to the British level, the margin of advantage which Germany now enjoys will be abolished. Her exports of staples must be ruined, the existing customs duties would no longer suffice for the protection of native industry, and capital would migrate to countries where it might command better returns.

A number of official and industrial personages to whom I have stated this difficulty, have remarked in reply, that the idea was new to them, and that they did not know how to escape the conclusion that it was a Reductio ad absurdum¹¹ of the first of the Imperial Rescripts. The managers of a leading company observe, that although their article, which goes all over the world, is almost a speciality, a limitation of their hours of labour to the english [*sic*] level must at once entail the closure of their works. The only escape would be, by the distribution of the present wage fund amongst an increased number of hands, which would mean more Social Democracy, and prospective Revolution.

Source: The National Archives, FO68/175.*

¹⁰ See the note on Strachey’s previous report.

¹¹ Latin: “reduction to an absurdity.”

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 12, Dresden
(February 21, 1890)

Social Democratic victories in the Reichstag elections of February 12, 1890, were startling to Saxon authorities and public opinion. Twelve years of repression under the Anti-Socialist Law had not destroyed the socialist movement, and the pro-Bismarckian parties in 1890 lacked the patriotic rallying cry of 1887. Hence, "the Hydra of Social-Democracy has risen again with unprecedented vigour." For a comparison of Reichstag election results in February 1887 and February 1890, see Strachey's own calculations in his report and [table 10](#), below. The following additional note was attached to Strachey's report:

"[To] Sir T. Sanderson.... It is our general habit to mark M^r Strachey's Despatches with a[n] X only.¹² But the present one in spite of its style, is of more than usual interest. Should it not be circulated to the Cabinet, and sent to the Home Office, for perusal? W.A.C.,¹³ 24 February 1890. 'Certainly. I have marked it acc[or]d[ing]ly. Strachey though 'crusty' is decidedly clear, and when he has something practical to write about, he writes well.' T.H.S. [Thomas Henry Sanderson]"

As long as I can remember, the leading personages here, ministerial[,] civic and industrial, with the entire Conservative and National-Liberal majority, and the Government and Bismarckian newspapers without exception, have never ceased reiterating their ~~belief, or allegation,~~ assurance, that under the admirable system of joint proscription and cajolery devised by the wisdom of the Imperial Administration, the working classes of the Kingdom, and of the Empire, were being gradually, but surely, weaned from the Socialist heresy. Dissenters from this belief, or allegation, were set down as sympathizers with the propaganda, and, if too openly expressing their doubts, were liable to ~~be boycotted in society~~ suffer in their offices or professions.

Yesterday's polls rudely dispelled the received illusion. Recovering beyond all hope from the discouragements and reverses suffered under the "Cartel" coalition of 1887,¹⁴ the Hydra of Social-Democracy has risen again with unprecedented vigor, and with such an augmentation of

12 "X," in the Western Department of the Foreign Office, had multiple meanings, including "put by" (i.e., filed without further action).

13 William A. Cockerell (1840–1919) was a senior clerk in the Consular Department of the Foreign Office, 1893–1906. On T.H. Sanderson, the permanent undersecretary, see an earlier note.

14 The parties belonging to Bismarck's pro-governmental "Cartel" were the German Conservative Party, the Imperial and Free Conservative Party, and the National Liberal Party.

electoral strength, that some of the polls recorded appear scarcely credible.

Saxony sends 23 members to the Reichstag. In 1887 the Social-Democrats held 7 seats, all of which they lost to the “Cartel” coalition at the dissolution of that year. They have now apparently regained 4 or 5 of those seats, and have the prospect of adding to their number at the casting [run-off] elections which may be requisite.

As the combination against them has been well sustained, this result is remarkable. But the real significance of yesterday’s polls will be apparent from a few comparisons, which I make in round numbers.¹⁵

Social Democratic Polls in

		<u>1887</u>	<u>1890</u>
Zittau	[Saxony’s 1st electoral district]	1,700	4,860
Leipzig county	[13th district]	19,300	27,280
Zwickau	[18th district]	12,900	19,450
Chemnitz	[16th district]	15,350	24,000
Bautzen	[3rd district]	1,550	3,881
Freiberg	[9th district]	5,600	8,037
Dresden Altstadt	[5th district]	9,170	13,126

The press has not yet uttered a word of comment on these figures which, striking as they are, do not tell their whole story unless they are compared with data taken from the General Election of 1884. I find, for instance, that in the parliamentary period 1884–1887, the Social Democratic vote augmented in Chemnitz 6 per cent, while yesterday’s poll there shewed an advance on 1887 of no less than 50 per cent. For Leipzig, the growth in the former triennial period was 4 per cent: in the last similar period 27 per cent. In Dresden: 6 per. cent, then, 45 per. cent now. In Zittau: against a diminution then[,] 180 per. cent now. Zwickau: instead of 10 per cent, now 35 per. cent. Freiberg: against a diminution in 1887, yesterday an addition to the Socialist poll of 45 per. cent since the last General Election.

There has been in some places a falling off of the ‘Cartel’ vote, which I conjecturally ascribe to the absence of a good electoral cry like that of 1887. “Vote for your old Emperor and the Military Septennate” was felt as a more positive actuality than the mere call to defeat, on general

15 These results are not accurate, sometimes deviating by 2,000 or more votes from the actual totals. See [table 10](#). For colour maps showing the winning parties and their opponents in all twenty-three Saxon Reichstag constituencies in February 1890, and the “party bastions” – which in stark contrast to 1887 had been reduced to six – see [map S.6.1](#) and [map S.6.2](#) in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*.

Table 10. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1887 and 1890

	February 21, 1887			February 20, 1890		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
Saxony						
Conservatives	178,517	34.4	12	160,407	28.0	13
National Liberals	161,348	31.1	10	112,514	19.7	3
Left Liberals	29,873	5.7	1	52,776	9.2	1
Antisemites	—	—	0	4,788	0.9	0
Social Democrats	149,270	28.7	0	241,187	42.1	6
Total votes cast / seats	522,025		23	574,974		23
Voter turnout rate (%)	79.6			82.0		
Reich						
German Conservatives	1,147,200	15.2	80	895,103	12.4	73
Free Conservatives	736,389	9.8	41	482,314	6.7	20
National Liberals	1,677,979	22.2	99	1,177,807	16.3	42
Left Liberals	1,061,922	14.1	32	1,307,485	18.0	76
Antisemites	11,593	0.2	1	47,536	0.7	5
Social Democrats	763,128	10.1	11	1,427,298	19.7	35
Total votes cast / seats	7,570,710		397	7,261,659		397
Voter turnout rate (%)	77.5			71.6		

Source: Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 235 (and for explanatory notes).

Note: Some parties have been omitted for the sake of clarity.

grounds, the candidates of Social-Democracy, whose chimaeras are not at present within the range of practical politics.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/175 (final).*

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 13, Dresden (February 24, 1890)

The British envoy tallies up the results of Reichstag voting, dividing the parties into supporters or opponents of the government. The majority of voters, he reports, have cast their ballots “on various grounds, practical or Utopian, against the dominant political system.” The last paragraph of his report finds Strachey chronicling the authorities’ hyperbolic fear of revolution when the election results were to be announced:

the governing class of Saxony and its military, he reports, would have been ready to give protesters “a whiff of grape-shot” at the slightest provocation.

My provisional estimate of the results of the polls understated the success of the Social-Democrats. In 1887, of the 23 members composing the Saxon contingent to the Imperial Parliament, 6 were Socialists, all of whom were displaced by ‘Cartel’ candidates at the General Election of that year. Friday’s result was not, as at first seemed, this recovery by the Social-Democrats of the 4 or 5 of the seats thus lost, but that they regained the entire 6.

A German electoral majority must be ‘absolute’: i.e. the winning poll must be more than half of all the votes recorded. In accordance with this rule, several casting [run-off] ballots will be required, 3 of them between ‘Cartel’ candidates and Social-Democrats, in each of which the latter have fair prospects of success.

It is much easier to copy general reflections from newspapers, or to invent them, than to collect and put together electoral statistics, which are tedious reading. But the present situation is one of arithmetic, and I must again resort to comparisons of figures.

The Saxon Social-Democratic vote was:

In 1884:	128,140
In 1887:	151,000
In 1890:	236,140

The augmentation since the last election is therefore the overwhelming number of 80,000 votes.

The ‘Cartel’ poll on Friday was 70,000 below that recorded at the previous General Election, while the ‘freisinnig’ [Radical] Party nearly doubled their old insignificant force. These last are still a mere fraction of the constituencies, not forming a tenth of the active electoral body.

Putting together the totals, I find that of 560,000 Saxon voters on Friday last, 270,000 polled for ‘Throne and Altar’, while nearly 290,000 protested, on various grounds, practical or Utopian, against the dominant political system. Of the electors on the register (adults of 25 years of age) from 70 to 80 per. cent gave their votes.

The population of Saxony, and in particular of Dresden, is, in all ranks, an unsurpassed model of decorous and obedient behaviour. But the authorities are constantly ~~anticipating~~ haunted by the fear of tumults whose occurrence is altogether inconceivable except by the

official mind. During the evening and night of Friday, although the city was tranquil almost to somnolence, the entire garrison, consisting of 10 Battalions of Infantry, 5 Squadrons of Cavalry, and artillery ad libitum,¹⁶ was kept ready to move at a moment's notice, as if Prairial or Vendémiaire¹⁷ was in prospect. Familiar as I am with the spirit which animates the governing class, and the higher military, I can say that if any disturbances had arisen there would have been alacrity rather than reluctance in using the troops, and in resorting to the "whiff of grape-shot."

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/175 (final).

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 14, Dresden (March 7, 1890)

The Social Democrats have won no further seats in the Saxon run-off elections. The "parties of order" rallied around whichever run-off candidate opposed a socialist. Strachey notes that Saxon liberals represent a kind of dying middle on the political spectrum, emphasizing the polarizing antagonism between Social Democrats and "High Conservatives." In fact, he reports, the government's own semi-official gazette lumps liberals and Social Democrats together as "scum."

The Saxon casting [run-off] elections have not brought the Social Democracy any further successes. The scales were turned against them by the 'freisinnig' [Radical] vote, a portion of which was polled for the 'Cartel', while the Socialists mostly stood aloof where liberals were contesting seats with 'Cartel' candidates. The final electoral results to the kingdom are: the two Conservative parties are at their old strength (13) the single 'freisinnig' member¹⁸ is re-seated while the 3 [*sic*; in-text addition in red: "9?"]¹⁹ National Liberals are reduced to 3, having lost 6 seats to the Social Democrats.

16 Latin: "according to pleasure, as desired."

17 Respectively, the ninth and first months in the French revolutionary calendar.

18 Louis Heinrich Buddeberg, a businessman, represented the first Saxon electoral district (Zittau) from 1881 to 1887 for the German Progressive Party, from 1887 to 1898 for the German Radical Party, and 1907 to 1912 for the German Radical People's Party.

19 "9" was in the draft report. The National Liberals had elected ten deputies in Saxony in 1887.

If these figures are compared with those for the Empire, it is seen that in Saxony the representation of the political extremes, High Conservatism and Social Democracy, is overwhelmingly above the normal, while the repression of the National-Liberals is excessive, and the 'Freisinn' is at a standstill.

In Germany, where society strictly rests on the basis of caste, incitements to class hatreds are doubly foolish. Nevertheless, in emulation of the 'Reptiles' of Berlin, Hamburg, and Cologne, the local Bismarckite press organs are making it their business to envenom and complicate the new situation, by speaking of the victors in insulting and exasperating terms. Threats of a dissolution, of a German Brumaire,²⁰ and the like, alternate with violent diatribes against the opposition, the principal objects of this vituperation being the 'freisinnig' electorate, whose political beliefs and aims are misrepresented, and ascribed to infamy of personal motive, although the party includes something like the majority of the bourgeoisie of Protestant Germany, of the professions, and, in places, of the civil and judicial service, and is, in fact, as loyal and Conservative a class as exist in Europe.

The Ministerial [Dresdner] 'Journal' systematically brackets the independent liberals with the Social-Democrats, and treats them, as mere political scum. This organ gravely argues that Socialism has reduced the working-classes by its alluring visions of material ease and enjoyment, and says that the cure for the disease will in due time be vouchsafed, though not through the arm of flesh. The [Dresdner] 'Nachrichten' boldly ascribes a certain share in the recent electoral calamities to the Emperor's rescripts [*Erlasse*],²¹ and the Editor²² says that this opinion is very general. He has reluctantly come to the conclusion that the gagging system has broken down, and is unable to see the beneficial effects which official eyes discern as resulting from the new state Socialism.²³

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/175 (final).*

20 The reference is to the coup of November 9, 1799 (18 Brumaire in the year VIII in the French Republican calendar), when Napoleon overthrew the governing *Directoire exécutif*.

21 See Strachey's reports from February 1890.

22 Carl August Emil Bierey (1838–99), an author and editor of strong conservative and antisemitic convictions, was a long-time municipal councillor in Dresden. He edited the *Dresdner Nachrichten* from 1872 to 1890.

23 See Strachey's reports from the 1880s.



Figure 19. “Dropping the Pilot,” 1890. Perhaps the most well-known British comment on German affairs is this political cartoon from *Punch* magazine. The artist, Sir John Tenniel, depicts the young Kaiser Wilhelm II’s decision to set a new political course after forcing Chancellor Bismarck into retirement on March 18, 1890. He did so in part because of the disastrous political situation created by the Social Democrats’ momentous victory in the Reichstag elections the previous month. The cartoon was published in *Punch* (London) on March 29, 1890, and continues to be adapted to this day when major political leaders (e.g., Churchill, Khrushchev, Thatcher) are forced to resign.

Source: Public domain.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 23, Dresden
(April 17, 1890)

German authorities held exaggerated fears that the first celebration of May Day would result in violence. This and the following reports chronicle what actually happened. Social Democrats, having just scored a huge victory in the February Reichstag elections, had no intention of risking street battles on May 1.

The leading Social-Democrats have been discussing how effect can best be given to the decision of the “Congress of Paris”²⁴ [1889] in favor of a universal Labour demonstration on the 1st of May. The journalist [Max] Schippel,²⁵ who represents Chemnitz – the Saxon, or German Manchester – in the Reichstag, pressed his associates to call on the workmen of Germany to keep the day in question as a holiday, and to organize parades, processions, and meetings, calculated to impress the public with the importance of the 8 hour movement.

Social Democracy has its ‘Invincibles’ and its Parnellites,²⁶ and, compared with Schippel, those old parliamentary hands, [August] Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht, are almost Conservative in feeling and language. Whatever may be thought of Liebknecht’s social Utopia, he writes and speaks with unusual force, and, as far as general topics are concerned, he would not, in England, be thought a very subversive politician. In concert with Bebel, he has combated the Schippel programme, arguing that the 31st of April²⁷ is a holiday in Prussia (fast-day) and that few operatives [working men] could afford to waste a second day, or even a half day. His advice to workmen was – avoid all tumults, especially

24 Resolution agreed at the International Workers’ Congress at Paris (subsequently known as the Second International) on July 20, 1889.

25 Max Schippel (1859–1928) was a writer and editor and Reichstag deputy for the sixteenth Saxon district of Chemnitz from 1890 to 1905. He belonged to *Die Jungen* (The youths) who pushed August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht to adopt a more aggressive “revolutionary” line for the party. Schippel and his likeminded comrades were eventually marginalized. In 1890 Schippel was editor and publisher of the *Berliner Volkstribüne*; thereafter he was a regular contributor to *Die Neue Zeit* and the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*.

26 The Irish National Invincibles created international news in 1882 when they assassinated two of the most senior government officials in Ireland in Phoenix Park. Parnellites were Irish nationalist supporters of Charles Stewart Parnell. By 1890 it was well known that Bebel and Liebknecht disavowed the tactics of anarchists.

27 The underlining here originated from someone in the Foreign Office, who added a smug marginal note: “The 31st of April does not exist in most Countries. The 30. must be meant.”

street processions: May-day meetings to petition for the eight hours day would be sufficient. Provocative agents were not wanting, and amongst the operatives there were numerous madcaps, who, in the explosive social conditions now existing, might easily produce mischief. "Do not discredit the movement: quiet, steady, progress is wanted, not noisy street "effects"["].²⁸

The question has now been considered at a conclave of the Socialist members of the Reichstag, held in Halle [on April 13], who have issued a manifesto to the working classes of Germany which shews by its moderate, warning, language, that the counsels of Bebel and Liebknecht have prevailed. A certain concession is, however, made to the Schippel party; for while the 35 parliamentary leaders of Social Democracy dissuade their followers from giving the intended manifestation an identical form, they say, parenthetically, that there will be no objection to the Mayday holiday in cases where it can be taken without giving rise to conflicts.

The Schippel programme could not fail to cause great irritation to the employers of labour. Some works have announced that they will reply to a holiday by a lock-out: others, that hands absent on the 1st of May will not be employed further. The tone of the Rescript of Halle²⁹ has somewhat reassured the public; but the apprehension that disturbances may occur is not dispelled, and its presence has confirmed the depression of industrial values.

I am informed that the Saxon Government is in communication with Berlin as to the measures of prohibition, or precaution, which it may be desirable to order for the 1st of May. If the Prussian authorities decide on interference with meetings, or other manifestations, their example will be followed with alacrity here. The official caste, in all ranks, talks of strikers and socialists as if they were foreign enemies. The language I hear is: "the time is not far distant when those people must be shot down with artillery". The capitalist and shopkeeper class are equally intemperate.

...

P.S. According to the latest accounts, the operatives of this Kingdom, and of the adjoining regions, are disposed to acquiesce in the recommendations of the Parliamentary leaders of the Socialist party.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/175.*

²⁸ In an open letter to Schippel, published on April 1, 1890.

²⁹ Meaning the conclave of SPD Reichstag deputies on April 13, mentioned previously.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 27, Dresden
(April 25, 1890) (draft)

Saxony's minister of the interior has learned that the leaders of Germany's federal states have decided on a common strategy in preparation for possible Social Democratic disruptions or worker absenteeism on May 1, 1890. Government restraint seems to be the order of the day.

The Minister of the Interior [Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz] tells me that the Governments of Germany have concerted a line of action for the 1st of May. Outdoor assemblages and processions will not be permitted, but ordinary meetings of operatives [workers] may take place, subject to the usual restrictions as to persons, and topics of discussion, and to any special precaution that local circumstances may suggest. The question of formal prohibitions, and of the publication of a Ministerial warning, is under consideration here. Herr von Nostitz is, however, at present opposed to ostensible official interference [with SPD demonstrations], which might have the effect of an irritant. Orders in the above sense have been given to the provincial Saxon boards, which, I need perhaps hardly say, like the corresponding authorities in Prussia, are, except as to administrative routine, mere organs of the Government, although British declaimers on the subject imagine them to be independent popular bodies, with political wills of their own, like our new County Councils.

Herr von Nostitz says that, according to his information, the workmen of Saxony are disposed to follow the dissuasions of [August] Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht rather than the exhortations of [Max] Schippel, and with their view the newspaper reports agree. His Excellency thinks that the strikers on the 1st of Mayday will be a vanishing fraction, and that such 8 Hours manifestations as may occur in Germany will be of an orderly character, except, possibly, in certain parts of Silesia, where the miners and operatives are infected by the excitement which prevails in the contiguous Austrian districts. The Minister further remarks, that owing to the inflammatory conditions of the labour market, purchasers and makers are shewing considerable reserve in regard to new engagements, and that with a prolongation of the present state of things industrial prosperity will suffer a decided arrest.

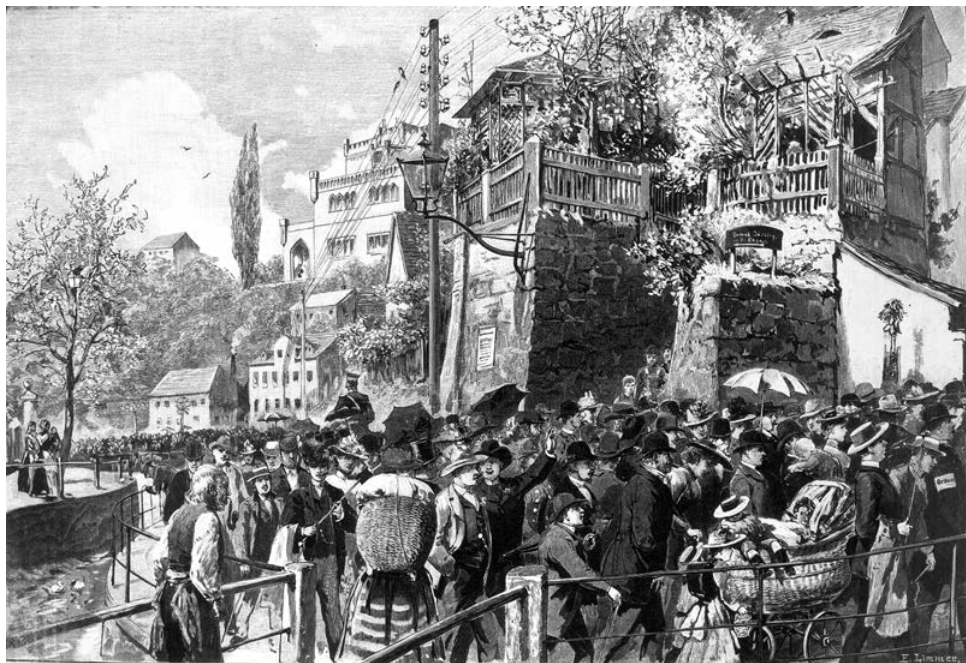


Figure 20. “The Workers’ Demonstration on 1 May in Dresden: Exodus of Workers to Loschwitz” (1890). This woodcut, after an original drawing by E. Limmer, conveys the determination of Dresden’s lower and lower-middle classes to celebrate May Day according to their wents – massively, multi-generationally, joyously, peaceably. Some in the group pictured here may have been on their way to the garden of the “Schweizerei” restaurant in Loschwitz*, shown in the following figure, though the apparel seen here is more varied than that worn by Social Democrats who joined August Bebel for a celebratory drink.

Source: “Die Arbeiterkundgebung am 1. Mai in Dresden: Auszug der Arbeiter nach Loschwitz,” *Illustrierte Zeitung* (Leipzig), Bd. 94, Nr. 2445 (May 10, 1890): 477 / bpk Bildagentur / Art Resource, NY.

* The suburb of Loschwitz was to Dresden, Strachey reported, as Richmond was to London. As noted in a report dated May 8, 1891.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 29, Dresden (May 2, 1890)

The advice of Bebel and Liebknecht was largely followed, and peace reigned on May 1, 1890. Here Strachey outlines the views of state authorities and pro-government journals on the issue of working-class unrest. “Entire brigades and divisions of troops under arms,” he reports, were called out in readiness.

No traces of the international strike were visible in Dresden, and no disturbances have been reported from the provinces, where, as here, the absentees from work were a minimum.

The competent authorities of this capital anticipated, at the worst, a little extra movement in the streets after night-fall. But where we should employ half-a-dozen additional policemen, German precaution calls entire brigades and divisions of troops under arms, and accordingly the garrisons of Dresden, Leipzig and other places, were consigned to barracks all day, and sentries were doubled, by ministerial order. Some prudent Colonels, however, being of opinion that the possibilities of Revolution may still be present, have required their officers to remain ready at call till to-morrow evening.

Open air assemblages and processions were not forbidden by proclamation, except in Leipzig, where it was notified that the police had orders in case of resistance, to “use their weapons.” Two meetings of workmen were held here at which Socialists of note delivered harangues on the Eight hour day.

Some of the municipalities of the Kingdom, and the State Railway Department, warned the operatives [workers] in their pay that absentees on the 1st of May would be dismissed. In Chemnitz, all the employers of labour in the spinning, weaving, machine, tool, and foundry branches, signified a similar determination to their hands. Numerous manufacturers, building societies, metal workers &c &c in Dresden, and elsewhere in Saxony, adopted the same course, or threatened strikers with reprisals in the form of a lock-out.

Certain radical journals accuse the organs which can no longer be called Bismarckian of intentionally treating the labour-problems of the day in a comminatory style calculated to inflame class hatreds and provoke collisions. The charge is somewhat highly coloured; but these burning topics are, no doubt, discussed in some quarters, in language which, amongst ourselves, would be thought reprehensible. I have from time to time reported that the representatives of capital and industry, and, above all, the official hierarchy, are too apt to think of the operatives of Germany as a ‘swinish multitude’ which, if recalcitrant, must be brought to reason by bayonets and grape-shot. The following is characteristic of Imperial Germany. I stated to an official who has had high employment in the local civil administration, that I could not understand the Saxon regulations equivalent to our Riot-Act.³⁰ The answer was, that on this subject legislation was

30 The Riot Act of 1714 gave the authorities the power to forcibly disband groups of twelve or more people who were rowdy, or had unlawfully come together and who had ignored pleas to disperse.

silent: the police and military had to look, not to the law, but to their instructions.

...

P.S. The latest telegrams confirm my first paragraph. Chemnitz reports 3 cases of unauthorized absence, amongst 30,000 hands counted. There was [an] evening demonstration held in the shape of an excursion of 6000 operatives of both sexes to a neighbouring village.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/175 (final).*



Figure 21. August Bebel (*highlighted*) celebrates May Day 1890 with fellow Social Democrats in the garden of the “Schweizerrei” – a popular restaurant in the Dresden suburb of Loschwitz. To Bebel’s left in the photograph is Paul Singer. During the event Bebel delivered a speech advocating the eight-hour working day.

Source: *Dresdner Hefte* 22, Heft 80 (2004), back endpaper / Stadtmuseum Dresden.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 35, Dresden (June 6, 1890)

Strachey reports that Saxony’s war minister finds it absurd that military spending is controlled by Reichstag deputies (“political babblers”). Yet the minister appears to like the more temperate tone of German politics since Bismarck’s departure from office in March 1890. To the envoy’s

amazement, he even refers to August Bebel as “the greatest orator of Germany.”

Count [Alfred von] Fabrice informed me yesterday that the prospects of the new Army Bill³¹ in the Reichstag were encouraging. Although the opposition are so much augmented in numerical strength, their temper is less combative than it was in previous Parliaments....

His Excellency ... diverged into an excursus on the absurdity of the measures requisite for public defence being controlled by political babblers. However, he is aware that even the Germans will not submit to the rule of “Major-Generals,” and on my remarking – that is ‘Utopia’ –, he assented, and agreed that having got our Parliaments we must stomach them.

I alluded to the improvement in German parliamentary manners, and said that it was a new sensation to read a speech by the Reichskanzler, which did not assume that every one who objected to official doctrines, or proposals, was an insolent, factious, ruffian. Count Fabrice said that ... the spirit of moderation is visible all round – a verity which he unconsciously proceeded to illustrate in his own person, by speaking with impartiality, and even with benevolence, of the leaders of the ‘freisinnig’ [Radical] party, and concluding with superlatives in favour of [August] Bebel, whom he called the greatest orator of Germany – which was not so before.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/175.*

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 46, Dresden (October 11, 1890)

Just as German authorities entertained exaggerated fears of street violence on May Day, the expiry of the Anti-Socialist Law at the end of September has already prompted the anti-socialist press to express fears for what the future might look like without this exceptional law. The Conservative press counsels a return to religious belief as the “proper antidote” to popular unrest. Meanwhile Social Democratic leaders advise

31 A bill to amend the Imperial Military Law of 1887, proposing to increase the army’s strength by 18,577 additional men, yielding a total of 486,983. The bill was passed on June 28, 1890, but a further increase proposed in 1892–3 was resisted by the Reichstag, causing a dissolution of parliament and unscheduled elections in June 1893.

their followers to exercise prudence: the German Criminal Code still offers ample means for the authorities to persecute them.

The expiration of the law against Social-Democracy³² has inspired the journals with articles full of the insincerity, servility, and obscurity usual in German political writing. The courtly, official, and professional classes see in all opposition a form of anarchy, and it is their belief that there can be no effective government without the use of the gag. Prince Bismarck's proscription of the Socialists has had their complete approval, and they are reluctant to admit that, like his attack on the Romish Church, it has demonstrated the incapacity of the statesmanship of his school for dealing with some of the higher problems of modern politics.

These views are reflected by the 'patriotic' newspapers, which pretend to be unaware that, under the repression and persecution of the last twelve years, a mere fraction of the electorate has grown to be in numerical strength the second party of the Empire, and that the worst of modern German legislative blunders has produced a dangerous aggravation of class animosities and alarms. The old 'reptile' habit³³ is visible in the argument, that the complexion of affairs will seem reassuring, when it is remembered that the Emperor has deigned to declare that he would "dash in pieces those who crossed his will", and that it was his august intention to "avert from society the dangers which menace it with their shadow." The Dresden 'Journal' and Leipzig 'Zeitung'³⁴ drown the realities of the subject in a flood of dreary, quasi-philosophical, abstractions, and see in a recrudescence of religious belief the proper antidote to the theories of [August] Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht. Not only so, but the official Saxon organs, using language which would have seemed slavish even to the subjects of Frederick the Great and Augustus the Strong, exhort the public to "unconditional obedience to the Crown and its bearer".

The Socialist newspapers and orators are recommending to their partizans reserve and prudence in the exercise of their recovered political rights. They remark that the ordinary criminal law of the Empire is an armoury in which the timidity and intolerance of the governing class will discover weapons against Social Democracy hardly less effective than the late exceptional legislation. The Saxon authorities have already

32 It expired at midnight on September 30, 1890, having been in effect since October 1878.

33 On the Bismarckian "reptile press," see previous notes.

34 Both newspapers were semi-official organs of the Saxon government.

exemplified this, by prohibiting some of the meetings called in the Kingdom for the election of Socialist delegates to the Council of Halle.³⁵

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/175.

**George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 47, Dresden
(October 25, 1890)**

Saxony's minister of war has concluded that the Anti-Socialist Law, recently expired, "entirely failed." Instead, it increased "bitterness and hatred" in the land. To Strachey's astonishment, the minister concedes that he looks forward one day to the prospect of actually shooting down Social Democrats.

German cabinet ministers enjoy a certain exemption from the rule which forbids the civil and military servants of the crown to question, even in private conversation, the wisdom of official policy and programmes.

Count [Alfred von] Fabrice occasionally takes advantage of his position [as minister of war] to criticize German, or even Saxon, statesmanship, and he did this recently when I asked him what he should describe as the net result of the law against Social Democracy which had just expired.

His Excellency said, that he had now come to the conclusion that the proscription had entirely failed as an engine of discouragement and repression, and that it probably had a mischievous effect in engendering bitterness and hatred. The law was impotent because it was a half-measure. If you undertook to silence and extirpate opinions, you must not operate with flea-bites, but take means of the most drastic sort.

When I said – 'you mean shooting', the General intimated that he did, but that of course such a policy could at present only exist in dream-land. He said that the Emperor [Wilhelm II], who seemed just now to think that Social Democracy should be allowed its head, would oppose stringent measures, and that there was on all sides a disposition to leave the Socialists to themselves. Newspapers might abuse [August] Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht, but they were not madmen, and it was improbable that they would encourage their followers to revolutionary acts.

By 'Leaving people to themselves' Germans do not mean what we mean, and the local Socialist press reports several arbitrary acts of interference

35 The first congress of the renamed Social Democracy Party of Germany (SPD) held after expiry of the Anti-Socialist Law convened in Halle on October 12–18, 1890.

with their party by the police. The recent death of the Saxon Minister of Justice³⁶ will probably have an influence in the direction of greater lenity, or increased severity, in reaching the Social-Democratic propaganda by stretches of the ordinary criminal law.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/175.

**George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 51, Dresden
(November 14, 1890) (draft)**

Strachey reports on a joint meeting organized by the Conservative Party's State Association for the Kingdom of Saxony and a local branch of the Colonial Society, held recently in Dresden.³⁷ His report demonstrates how little traction Social Democrats – with their propaganda against militarism, colonialism, and the abuse of human rights – had gained among middle-class Saxon burghers. At the meeting, the colonial adventurer Carl Peters delivered the main address, followed by Paul Mehnert,³⁸ described by Strachey as “the local leading wire-puller of his party.” A sarcastic tone intrudes when Strachey reports on these men's anti-British polemics.

Where the traveller [Peters] was facetious and satirical, the politician [Mehnert] was acrimonious and malignant. Our [Great Britain's] delinquencies were stated with emphasis, and 2000 intelligent Saxons learned that ‘England’ had ordered D^r. Peters be ‘arrested, and, if possible, placed in chains’. If hatred of a country with political and social institutions like ours is, to a German conservative, a second nature, so is servility to the higher powers, and accordingly D^r. Mehnert alluded to the King in language almost fulsome enough for the Tudor age, his shower of compliments to his sovereign including the assurance that D^r. Peters had been specially cheered in his dark moments by thinking of His Majesty's interest in his enterprise....

36 Christian von Abeken; see the earlier note about his persecution of socialists.

37 See also Carl Peters's chauvinistic speech to Dresden Conservatives, described in Strachey's report dated November 9, 1888; *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, 2:318–20.

38 Karl Paul Mehnert (1852–1922) – known as the “uncrowned king of Saxony” – director of the Saxon Agricultural Credit Association, chairman of the Conservative Association in Dresden, Reichstag deputy for Meißen 1890–93, president of the lower house of the Saxon *Landtag* (1899–1909), and member of the upper house (1909–18).

After the meeting was a ‘Commers’ or oratorical symposium, with a great flow of beer and flowery rhetoric, when the words ‘idea’ and ‘ideal’ were reiterated ‘usque ad nauseum’,³⁹ and the auditory was repeatedly reminded that the principal intellectual and moral virtues are the Exclusive possession of the German people....

The interest in Dr. Peters extends beyond the Colonial Party; [but there are] many friends of humanity in whom the traveller’s business-like accounts of his butcheries of Suahelis [*sic*] and Massai excited disapprobation.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40.

**George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 20, Dresden
(May 1, 1891) (draft)**

Saxon government preparations for possible disturbances are again underway as Social Democratic workers will celebrate May Day two days hence. May 3 in 1891 was chosen by Social Democratic organizers as the day to demonstrate workers’ solidarity because it was a Sunday: therefore, workers could combine recreation with a political demonstration and yet avoid possible recriminations from employers for leaving their workplace, which had occurred the year before. As Strachey reports, it is the police who might instigate violence: their chiefs “would have no compunction in attacking a defenceless crowd which assembled in a railway station or a beer-garden in forbidden numbers.”

[Saxon Foreign Minister] Herr von Metzsch informed me offhandedly, that his other Department (the Interior)⁴⁰ had instructed the proper administrative officials throughout the kingdom to give public notice, that out-door assemblages, and processions along streets or roads, would not be permitted on the 3rd Instant. The local authorities were also empowered to use their discretion in prohibiting demonstrations taking the shape of excursions in the large scale. He did not anticipate any disorder

³⁹ Latin: “to the point of nausea.”

⁴⁰ Karl Georg Levin von Metzsch (after 1899, Metzsch-Reichenbach, after 1916 Count von Metzsch-Reichenbach) (1836–1927). He was Saxon minister of foreign affairs, minister of the interior, and de facto government leader from 1891 to 1906. Metzsch’s first wife, Marion Göschen (1845–77), was sister to Lord George Goschen (1st Viscount Goschen) and Sir Edward Goschen (after 1906 British ambassador to Germany).

or irregularities, however slight; but as the elements of disturbance were not wanting just now, precaution was indicated.

On my asking if the tremendous military preparations for capturing barricades and subduing a revolution, made in Dresden last year, would be repeated on Sunday, His Excellency said that he believed not. The military would not be kept under arms; but no leaves would be given, so that the effective strength of the garrison would be maintained.

According to the local Socialist journal, the Minister's order was anticipated by the city. The proposal having been made to organize a trades procession in Dresden, it was notified to the promoters that workmen, and others, would not be permitted to walk through the streets in files or groups, or to excursionize in parties of monster dimensions; as ground for the prohibition, reference was made to the Saxon law on Meetings and Associations, which says – 'when there is pressing danger to the public repose, order, and safety, all assemblages, public processions, parades, and festivities may be prohibited'. This thin elastic paragraph, and other administrative Regulations, invests the Police with absolute power for the purposes supported. Their subjective feeling decides what constitutes danger, how many persons form an assemblage or a group, and what marks a monster excursion. Generally speaking, the Police are not tied to a pedantic observance of the law. If flagrantly wrong in interpretation, or brutal in repression, they will be approved by their ministerial or municipal chief.

Further, the Saxon gendarme, like Herr Metzsch himself, is exempt from outer criticism. It results from the delicate personal susceptibility which is so marked a feature of this race, from the sense of the sanctity of their office with which all German public servants are filled, that any open censure of authority brings on the critic a prosecution for libel – perhaps a series of them – with the attendant risks, or certainties, of imprisonment and fine. All this encourages the Police in a readiness to stretch their powers, and some of their chiefs would have no compunction in attacking a defenceless crowd which assembled in a railway station or a beer-garden in forbidden numbers.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 22, Dresden (May 8, 1891) (draft)

In trying to repress workers' demonstrations on May Day 1891 (celebrated on May 3, a Sunday), the authoritarian state's bark was worse than its bite. Strachey reports what happened.

The official Socialist programme for the 3rd of May was carried out in Dresden, and in the rest of the Kingdom, without disorder or excitement. As was explained by me last week, monster excursions were included in the prohibition directed against processions in columns or groups. Demonstration of that kind took place, however, all over Saxony, and the authorities did not create collisions by interfering with the peaceable crowds which flocked along the public roads.

In Leipzig a police placard almost invited resistance by warning the public that on the slightest disobedience to the gendarmerie, “the naked weapon”⁴¹ would be used. But here also, in spite of a brutal provocation, order was not disturbed.

The 8 hour party [the SPD] had fixed the Dresden rendezvous at some gardens of Loschwitz, on the Elbe (the Richmond of this city), where according to partisan calculations 90,000 persons assembled against the tyranny of capital and society. Red flags were not shewn, but the flowers and cards worn by the processionists, the shields and other devices at the gardens, were uniformly of the subversive colour, with which even casks of beer & lemonade were daubed. No speeches were made, but quasi-revolutionary couplets, set to popular melodies, were sung. The proceedings elsewhere in Saxony were similar.

As regards the numbers attending, I should utterly distrust both the figures given on Social Democratic authority & the fractional estimates of their enemies. And many of those present, who were accompanied by their wives and children, doubtless had nothing in their minds beyond the pleasure of a Sunday excursion. Still, the demonstration confirmed all that is otherwise known of the portentous strength of Social Democracy, shewing, besides, the perfect organizational discipline to which the party has attained.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 39, Dresden (September 4, 1891)

Strachey continues his practice of comparing Social Democratic activities each May Day and nationalist celebrations of Sedan Day (September 2) in

41 The phrase intimates the use of truncheons and possibly sabres by police, likely not firearms.

*Saxony.*⁴² *A parallelism is apparent: the socialists and their opponents both emphasize discipline and decorum. In 1891, Saxon patriotism is not conspicuously chauvinistic, despite nostalgia for the “founder of the Reich.”*

The Sedan day was kept throughout Saxony with the customary observances. In Dresden, there were the usual patriotic meetings, addresses, dinners, musical performances, street demonstrations, and illuminations, the whole, with the exception of an open-air municipal concert, being due to the initiative of private societies and persons.

With the evanescent side of the commemoration were associated the scholastic functions which, by their annual recurrence, made a deep impression on young Germany. As the Chief Burgomaster⁴³ remarked to me, it is not for nothing that every boy and girl in Saxony of the educational age is indoctrinated with the significance of the ‘crowning mercy’ which gave the nation its long-desired unity and greatness.

According to the above named authority, the public participation in the festivities of the day was visibly less than on some previous occasions. The diminuendo is, however, merely to be ascribed to the fact that this capital has shortly to undergo a domestic jubilee, which will make large demands on the enthusiasm of the citizens – the 100th birthday of the Dresden poet, [Theodor] Körner.

The anniversary of Sedan always gives rise to much ridiculous rhetoric, and some pardonable elation. But there is very little obtrusive chauvinism, speakers and writers laying the accent on the political importance and lessons of the day, rather than on its military glories. The [Dresdener] ‘Nachrichten’, which has joined the Friedrichsruhe [Bismarckian] gang, found its opportunity for contrasting the past and present of the Empire.... The prestige and power of the Germany of Gravelotte and Sedan⁴⁴ are gone with the withdrawal of the Master’s hand.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/176.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 44, Dresden (October 16, 1891) (draft)

Saxons eligible to vote in elections to the state parliament (Landtag) have just cast their ballots. Strachey reports on the political parties fighting for ascendancy in the Landtag.

42 Sedan Day was not an official German holiday – the German Empire had none – but it was celebrated as such by certain groups of patriotic citizens, albeit more enthusiastically in the 1870s and 1880s than later. It marked the decisive victory of German over French troops in the Franco-German War of 1870/1.

43 See the previous note on Stübel.

44 Two decisive German victories in the Franco-German War, 1870–1.

The partial elections prescribed before each biennial session of the Saxon Landtag, when one third of the members of the Second Chamber vacate their seats, have just taken place.

...

The division of political opinion here may be said to run on horizontal lines. All the landowners of the kingdom, whether nobility, gentry, or peasants, are Conservatives, the holders of small parcels excepted, whose agricultural occupation is subsidiary to industrial employment, which brings them under Socialist influence. In the same way, a Saxon in official place, remunerated or honorary, and not of Conservative opinions, is unthinkable. In Dresden, palatial and social pressure, or the fear of it, enforces Conservative politics on most tradesmen of substance, and on many of the upper commercial and professional ranks. Elsewhere in the kingdom the middle-class has a tendency towards National-Liberal opinions of very moderate colour: the 'freisinnig' [Radical] fraction is insignificant in Saxony. To Social-Democracy belong the bulk of the artisans &, still more, the factory hands, with many of the small shop-keeper class, some subordinate employés, and the agricultural residue above named.

The elections for the German Reichstag cause little excitement in Saxony: those for the Landtag still less, although the local legislation work touches the welfare of the kingdom more closely, than the work of the Imperial Parliament. The questions figuring in the electoral programmes recently set forth here cover some of the ground occupied in our own political discussions: For instance: Income Tax Reform: reduction of taxation on the poorer classes: construction of railways and docks: improvement of official salaries: reduction of railway rates: id. [the same for] slaughter tax: extension of the suffrage: abolition of the Upper Chamber: removal of the restrictions on the right of public meeting, free speech &c: abolition of the grain duties.

In the majority of the 30 Saxon constituencies contested this week the 'parties of order' had revived the coalition, or Cartel, against Social-Democracy, which led to much watering down of candidates programmes to suit local necessities. The language of the Conservatives was generally negative, the point of their addresses laying in appeals to the electorate to support 'Emperor, King, and Altar', against the assaults of the Revolution. The recommendations of the National-Liberals were a little more specific, and faintly progressive: 'freisinnig' opinions here are always much diluted. On the other hand the Socialist candidates, whose sustained energy in organization and agitating put all their opponents to shame, mainly confined themselves to the practical matters contained in lists given above, which they discussed from the ordinary radical points of view without much intrusion of their own esoteric articles of belief.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40.

**George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 45, Dresden
(October 16, 1891) (draft)**

The rise of Social Democratic votes in elections to the Saxon Landtag is becoming deeply worrying for the “parties of order” in Saxony. This rise is accelerating, as Strachey acknowledges by noting that eleven Social Democrats will now sit in the lower chamber.

In continuation of my previous Despatch I have to state the results of the elections for the 30 vacant seats in the Saxon Landtag. [Despite tardy reporting of the election results], ... it will be sufficient here to give the general issue, which was – augmentation of Social-Democracy, both in seats and in the vote.

Of the 30 retiring members, 4 were Socialists. The party contested 26 seats, and came out with a gain of 3, bringing their representation in this portion of the Landtag up to 7, instead of the original 4. Some years ago the entire contingent of Social-Democracy to the Landtag was 3 members. Thanks, in part, to the influence of the Bismarckian joint system of gagging, bribery, and humanitarian legislation and gagging, it will now number 11, the equivalent of a force of 92 in our House of Commons.

The growth of this party in the electorate is still more striking. For instance, in one of the Dresden constituencies the poll of Social-Democracy has now been twice as large as it was in 1885 (1664 to 820). In the other contested circle [electoral district] for the capital the Socialist vote was nearly 3 times that recorded on the former occasion.

The increase of the ‘parties of order’ has been only fractional and they are much discouraged by their defeats; but they find consolation in the circumstance that the enemy’s successes are due to their own divisions. It does not occur to them to remark, that but for the unnatural alliance⁴⁵ of Conservatives, National-Liberals and Progressists against the subversives, Social Democracy would have gained not 3 seats, but 10 or 15.

Source: National Archive, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/176 (final).

**George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 55, Dresden
(December 4, 1891)**

The “formidable phalanx” of parties, persons, and interests arrayed against Social Democracy in Saxony was large, but by late 1891,

45 Election pacts of mutual assistance or the nomination of joint candidates.

Bismarck's successor as Reich chancellor, Leo von Caprivi, was unloved by the same groups, as reported here. Strachey suggests that Caprivi would increase his standing by being "a little brutal" in the future; but he also notes worries among elites about the unpredictable policies and pronouncements of Kaiser Wilhelm II. The phrases that Strachey deleted between the draft and fair copy of his report reveal his dismissive attitude toward the political acumen of the German middle and upper classes, including their antipathy toward Jews.

General Caprivi's defence of his policy has excited a certain interest here. As far as I can judge, the general public is in a somewhat pessimist temper; but is not dissatisfied with "the new course", and is not looking for help from Friedrichsruhe [*sic*].⁴⁶ "The present discontents" are mainly felt by Conservatives, National-Liberals, Colonials, Anti-Semites, Protectionists, Bimetallists, Agrarians, and other adherents of the 'Cartel'. With them, the new Chancellor is unpopular, because he treats liberal opinions as a permissible form of political belief: because he appears to be unsound on Africa, the Tariff, Poland, and the Jesuit Laws: because he will not revive the Guilds, or legislate against the Jews; or place the Stock-Exchange under Police control, or tamper with the Gold coinage.

With their own sentiments on such matters, they consider Prince Bismarck to be more or less in touch, and his return to power would further be acceptable to them, as ensuring the revival of that ~~denouncing style in official behavior~~ hectoring, browbeating, manner in politics, on which, although in Germany its use gives great weight to the authority of public men, General Caprivi has turned his back.

These malcontents have numerous allies in the civil service, especially in Prussia, ~~amongst the other Protestant states of the Empire, in the educational bodies, officers in the army [and among] Germans who, from the possession of honorary official distinctions (Akademierath, Baurath, Commerzienrath & so on) conceive themselves to form part of the administrative hierarchy of the Empire.~~ and amongst the officers of the Army, whose grievances, however, form a chapter apart. The precise sentiments of such circles would be hard to define; but they may be said to regret the disappearance of what Bismarckites call the former Olympian elements in German statesmanship, what others call the brutalist oppressions / the arrogance and brutalities of "the old course."

46 Friedrichsruh, near Hamburg, was Bismarck's estate (with manor house) in retirement.

Under “the old course” [i.e., before Bismarck’s dismissal in March 1890], orders were obeyed in silent submission, and the discussion of Government personages and measures was a freedom on which no one in the public pay liked to venture. The gag has now been removed, and something like an English license of criticism has been growing up, which is called an anarchical and dangerous condition of things, due to the disappearance of the former “Olympian elements” in German statesmanship. If General Caprivi were to be a little brutal in official business,⁴⁷ ... the complaint would not be heard from his subordinates that he is a Minister without a policy....

The opposition so constituted is a formidable phalanx, which has its academic and ‘reptile’ supporters; but it is not the people of Germany. The parties of the Catholic centre, of Progress, of Constitutional and Social Democracy with the Guelphs, Poles, Danes, and Alsatians, form nearly two thirds of the active Electorate. Prince Bismarck’s resignation removed an Alp⁴⁸ from the minds of all of these, and it is their feeling that under his successor there has been a marked improvement in administrative aims and methods.

Looking to the above arithmetic, it may then be said, that a German plebiscite – (of Dresden I am not speaking) – would give General Caprivi a vote of confidence, a view which the results of recent bye-elections, Imperial and local, would seem to confirm.⁴⁹

Leaving the future undiscussed, I would venture on the statement that this nation does not, at present, desire Prince Bismarck’s return to office. Uneasiness exists; but it arises from a prevalent suspicion regarding the intentions of France and Russia, or from vague feeling which cannot be analyzed. And, unless I mistake, in respect both to domestic and foreign affairs, a certain disquietude has been recently growing amongst patriotic and loyal Germans because their faith in the wisdom and discretion of the Crown⁵⁰ has, of late, been so frequently and so rudely shaken.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/176 (final).*

47 Strachey specifies here a number of Bismarck’s well-known attacks on enemies inside and outside government as well as “his 5000 actions against libellers and defamers.”

48 Strachey may have been thinking here less of a mountain than a nightmare, for which the German word is *Alptraum*.

49 Strachey is referring to Reichstag and *Landtag* by-elections held in October–November 1891. See also Strachey’s two reports of 16 October 1891, above, on Social Democratic gains in the recent Saxon *Landtag* elections.

50 That is, Kaiser Wilhelm II.



Figure 22. “The Social Democrat Is Coming!!!” 1892. This cartoon from a socialist satirical journal describes the arrival of a Social Democrat in a rural German village, portraying the occasion – in pictures and an accompanying poem – as a morality tale. The village pastor is ringing the church bell to warn his parishioners “to save themselves, if they can.” Panic ensues until the socialist functionary (“*der rote Hans*”), under the wary eyes of police and priests, explains to the farmers why they are suffering capitalist exploitation (*top right*). By the end of the day (*bottom left*), the villagers are ready to celebrate their visitor and their new-found enlightenment.

Source: *Der Wahre Jacob* (Stuttgart), Jg. 9, Nr. 167, Beilage (Weihnachten 1892): 1364 / Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 12, Dresden
(March 21, 1892)

When a Social Democrat defeats a candidate of the "parties of order" in a Saxon by-election, the government and the non-socialist press prefer to remain silent.

The question has been argued, whether the legislative Prince Bismarck's campaign [*Kulturkampf*] against the Catholic Church or his proscription of the Socialists, has proved the greater blunder. Whatever the answer should be, it is now admitted that the [Anti-Socialist] Law of 1878 was highly favorable to the growth of Social Democracy, which at the last general German election [in February 1890] recorded a larger poll than any other political party. As I reported fully at the time, similar indications were visible at the late partial renewal of the Parliament [*Landtag*] of this kingdom, which the extensive gains of the Communists [*sic*], in seats and votes, shewed the increasing popularity of their programme with the electorate.⁵¹

In these circumstances, special interest should attach to the result of a bye-election for the Reichstag in a Saxon constituency (Reichenbach),⁵² which has been represented by Conservatives since the existence of the German Parliament, except in 1884–7, when a Social Democrat held the seat. Nevertheless, such is the want of enterprise in German journalism (corresponding, of course, with the absence of an intelligent public interest in political questions), that although the vacancy occurred some weeks ago, and the poll took place on the 15th Instant, the local press has hitherto persistently ignored the contest and has scarcely alluded to the result. The official organ has, however, reprinted ten lines from a Leipzig provincial paper, announcing a victory for the Social-Democrat,⁵³ which, says the [Dresdner] 'Journal', 'we give with all reserves'.

I am told by the highest authority, that the vacant seat has in fact been won by the Socialist candidate and that as this defeat of the parties of order is highly discreditable to them and the kingdom, it was better to take no notice/to keep silent to say nothing more on the matter. The idea that unpleasant controversies may be solved by dropping their discussion, is a

51 See Strachey's two reports dated October 16, 1891.

52 Saxony's twenty-second electoral district, usually referred to as Auerbach or Kirchberg-Auerbach.

53 Franz Hermann Theodor Hofmann (1852–1903), a cigar manufacturer in Chemnitz, won the by-election with 51.1 per cent of the vote. The seat had previously been held by a Conservative, Carl Bruno Kurtz. Hofmann held the seat until 1903, when another Social Democrat took his place. He also sat in the Saxon *Landtag* 1895–1901.

favorite notion with German politicians, and of the corresponding practise, known by the familiar verb ‘todtschweigen’,⁵⁴ the above is a good example.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/177 (final).

George Strachey to Earl of Rosebery, No. 39, Dresden (December 10, 1892)

*Saxony's political culture was infected not only with anti-socialism but also with radical antisemitism, which, Strachey reports, is shared by Conservatives and members of the highest social and political classes. Strachey's report is dated just two days after the German Conservative Party held a national congress in Berlin. That "Tivoli Congress" – named after the brewery in which it convened – was marred by protests from antisemitic rank-and-file members of the party, who believed party leaders were too aloof from the antisemitic movement.*⁵⁵

To day's [Dresdner] "Nachrichten" remarks that Rector [Hermann] Ahlwardt⁵⁶ is probably the most popular, and Judge Brausewetter⁵⁷ the best hated, man in the Empire. This is the natural exaggeration of an anti-Semitic organ: the nation is not sunk so low that, for instance, a plebiscite

⁵⁴ To hush up, literally to silence to death.

⁵⁵ The party's former chairman, Otto von Helldorff-Bedra – perhaps the staunchest advocate of Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Law in the Reichstag in 1878 – spoke for other Conservatives when he warned after the Tivoli Congress that "we are faced with a frightful brutalization of public opinion.... In the end, this [antisemitic] movement is the certain seed of Social Democracy." John C.G. Röhl, ed., *Philipp Eulenburgs politische Korrespondenz*, 3 vols. (Boppard am Rhein, 1976–83), 2:988–98. Further details in Retallack, *Notables of the Right*, ch. 7, and Retallack, *Red Saxony*, ch. 6.

⁵⁶ Hermann Ahlwardt (1846–1914) was headmaster of a Berlin primary school, anti-semitic publicist, and politician. He served as a Reichstag deputy from 1892 until 1902. The *Judenflinten* affair (see next note) and Ahlwardt's defeat of a Conservative candidate in a Reichstag by-election in December 1892 added to the acrimony and public resonance of the Conservatives' Tivoli Congress on December 8, 1890.

⁵⁷ Berlin Landgerichts-Direktor Bausewetter. The trial – dubbed the Jewish rifles trial (*Judenflinten-Prozess*) – revolved around two pamphlets in which Ahlwardt accused the armament company Ludwig Loewe & Co. of selling defective rifles and being part of a Franco-Jewish conspiracy against Germany. On December 9, 1892, Ahlwardt was found guilty of libel and sentenced to five months' imprisonment. See the somewhat sensationalist account in Hugo Friedlaender, *Mörder – Verräter – Attentäter. Gerichtsreportagen aus dem Kaiserreich*, ed. Gideon Botsch and Christoph Kopke (Berlin, 2008), 211–22.

would declare in favour of “The Headmaster of all the Germans.”⁵⁸ What is true is, that the monomania of Ahlwardt infects, in one shape or other, almost the entire Conservative electorate, whose jealousy of the Jews as unbelievers, as capitalists controlling the Stock-Exchange, as middlemen intruding between producer and purchaser, as liberal journalists and parliamentary leaders, is not without ramifications in the National-Liberal party. In this Kingdom, the ~~ignorant~~ unintelligent classes – I mean the ~~entire~~ Aristocracy and gentry, and Court, (the Royal Family excluded) – with the military and civil services, and no small number of traders and peasant proprietors, are in complete sympathy with the “Jew-Bait[er]”. Allowance being made for the comparative humanity of 19th Century feelings and ideals, the temper of the Anti-Semites of the New Germany towards “the circumsied [*sic*] dog”⁵⁹ may be said to be that of the contemporaries of Richard the 1st and Simon de Montfort. In the social circles to which I properly belong here, approval of the ‘Jew-Bait[er]’ is absolutely universal: I have just heard from a representative of the very highest local official enlightenment [*sic*], the opinion that, after all, “there is probably something in it”....

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/177 (final).*

George Strachey to Earl of Rosebery, No. 1, Dresden (January 4, 1893)

Public opinion in Saxony is in a state of “helpless pessimism” due to events of the past three years: these include Social Democracy’s emergence from legal repression and its growing strength at the ballot box, the apparent crest of antisemitic sentiment, an economic downturn, and worries about leadership in Berlin since Bismarck’s departure from office. The discontent noted by Strachey will contribute to protest votes cast in the unexpected Reichstag election in June 1893.

The New Year has opened amidst a chorus of universal discontent. Nearly everybody is dissatisfied with everything – industrial, commercial, social, political. Whether in private discussions, or in editorial retrospect[ive]s of 1892, the local tone is one of unmingled lamentation. Ministers, members

58 The designation relied on the German abbreviation “a.D.” (*außer Dienst*) for “in retirement.” Ahlwardt’s status as a retired headmaster (*Rektor a.D.*) was transformed by his followers into *Rektor aller Deutschen* (rector to all Germans). The same term was used after another antisemite, Adolf Stöcker, retired as court preacher, becoming *Hofprediger aller Deutschen* (court preacher to all Germans).

59 From William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, act 5, scene 2.

of the Bundesrath, generals, bankers, tradesmen, journalists – all appear to be under the influence of a helpless pessimism. The characteristic belief of the Germans, that the remedies for men's evils lie not in themselves, but with their rulers, is reflected by the press.

...

The disturbed condition of public and commercial affairs is laid to the charge of 'the New Course'. Count [Leo von] Caprivi has very few supporters in Saxony; but the clamours against his policy have no foundation in intelligent political dissent.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/178.*

George Strachey to Earl of Rosebery, No. 2, Dresden (January 14, 1893)

Strachey reports on the unpopularity of the Army Bill proposed by Kaiser Wilhelm II and Chancellor Leo von Caprivi, which German Social Democrats and many left liberals vehemently oppose.

If there were any stability in German public and parliamentary opinion, the Army Bill would have to be described as dead.... As far as I can see, repudiation of the Bill is nearly universal in all classes, the Military excepted: I have it from unimpeachable sources, that the peasant proprietary of the Kingdom protest against the increased taxation which is in sight. The Minister of Foreign Affairs⁶⁰ admits this, and believes that a similar spirit prevails in other parts of the Empire. He remarks, however, and with justice, that in Germany public opinion is not a serious political quantity, and he expects that the parliamentary opposition to the Bill will shortly evaporate. That is to say, the bulk of the Conservative and National-Liberal parties, and sections of the Catholic centre, will, at the last moment, not from motives like those which sway our House of Commons, but from their servile instincts, and terror of authority, turn their backs on all their late protestations, after the fashion of which the recent history of the Reichstag offers so many amazing examples. This line is to day recommended, or predicted, by the National-Liberal [Dresdner] 'Anzeiger' – (always an advocate of Byzantine proceedings) which argues, that as the Reichskanzler persists in his demands, the public must give way.

Herr von Metzsch and his colleagues would regret the development of a German parliamentary deadlock, like the Prussian [constitutional]

60 Saxon government leader Georg von Metzsch; see the earlier note on him.

‘Conflict’ period of 1860–66.⁶¹ But, if the Legislature proved intractable, Saxony would support an arbitrary solution of difficulties,⁶² even to the extent of a breach of the constitution, which might be proposed at Berlin. (In this Kingdom no invasion of popular rights, by a coup d’état or otherwise, would arouse any conceivable resistance, or even any vigorous protests. In this kingdom, resistance to an invasion of popular rights, whether by material or moral force, is utterly unthinkable. If Germany is not now in the hands of ‘Major-Generals’, the credit is due to the rulers of the 26 states of the Empire, and not to their subjects, who, at present, are incapable of firing a shot in defence of their liberties and laws.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/178 (final).*

George Strachey to Earl of Rosebery, No. 17, Dresden (May 11, 1893)

Strachey reports again on the unpopularity of the Army Bill. Its rejection by the Reichstag has resulted in the dissolution of parliament and a general election, to be held on June 15, 1893. Strachey notes that, as in the early 1860s, the issue of army reform in 1893 also involves fundamental questions about the constitutional rights of parliament and discussions in high political circles about the possibility of a coup d’état. In Saxony, Strachey feels, such a blow against parliamentarism “would command implicit obedience by a few strokes of the pen.”

On the publication of the proposals for the increase of the Army, nowhere in Germany was their reception more unfavorable than in this Kingdom. They were condemned as imposing burdens, personal and fiscal, in excess of the real requirements of the Empire, a judgment nearly identical with that of the heads of the Saxon administration, who assented with reluctance to the adoption of the intended reform as a Government measure.

61 During the “constitutional conflict” of 1860–6, liberal deputies in the Prussian *Landtag* opposed the wishes of Prussian King Wilhelm I (and War Minister Albrecht von Roon and Bismarck) to implement far-reaching army reforms.

62 Strachey hit the mark with this assessment. In a secret conversation of May 6, 1893 – held hours before Chancellor Caprivi dissolved the Reichstag and called a national election – Saxon government leader Georg von Metzsch and Caprivi discussed plans for repeated dissolutions, new elections, and possibly revoking universal manhood suffrage, all in the interest of combatting Social Democracy. Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden, Ministerium des Auswärtigen Angelegenheiten, Nr. 1078a, “Promemoria des Staatsministers v. Metzsch ...,” May 6, 1893, discussed in Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 274–5.

As discussion of the Bill advanced, its unpopularity grew. Except in the barracks, it seemed to have no supporters at all. Even the local official press did not venture to write in its favour. In a country with a serious constitutionalism, no ministry could have withstood the outcry which arose.

After a time, symptoms of change became perceptible. Amongst officials, editors, politicians, private persons, the national alacrity in ~~turning their backs on themselves~~ tergiversation began to assert itself. The reason was to be found, not in Count Caprivi's parliamentary arguments, to which very little weight was attached, but in the mixed influence of indifference and fear and, above all, of that Byzantine servility which is one of the most striking characteristics of the Bismarckian ~~aera~~ era.

By degrees advocacy of the Bill became general. Soon there were heard ambiguous voices, which recalled the Prussian 'Conflict-Time'⁶³ (relative to the Army organization) of thirty years ago, and hinted that, in the new Germany, popular resistance to the monarch's will would prove as futile as it did in the old. Such warnings were understood to foreshadow the eventuality of a coup d'état, a form of settlement to which, it was universally allowed ~~on all sides~~, the Emperor and his advisors would, if constitutional other methods failed, probably resort. In numerous confidential discussions of the subject I found it to be universally admitted as an axiom, that a violation of the constitution of the Empire would meet with no obstacles on the part of the confederated Governments, or with any resistance, however faint, even in the way of protest, from the German public. That Saxony and Dresden are actually in the condition of political impotence thus implied, is unquestionable. Here, as in the east of North-Germany, authority would command ~~unquestioning~~ implicit obedience by a few strokes of the pen.

Now that the Bill has been rejected, its merits and demerits are perhaps less discussed than its side issues. The Dresden 'Journal' sees in the late parliamentary proceedings proof that the time is come for a retrograde [*sic*] constitutional Reform, and that stern means must be found for compelling members to renounce the scandalous practice of voting with specific parties, instead of following the plain indications of Government experts. Other newspapers are ~~absorbed in regret for~~ chiefly lamenting the measures of reactionary legislation⁶⁴ ~~which were before~~ under debate by the late Reichstag, the reappearance of which, they fear, must be uncertain. Some are harping on what they call the fresh proof of the

⁶³ Referring to the "constitutional conflict" of 1860–6; see earlier note.

⁶⁴ Including the so-called *Lex Heinze*, which foresaw the censorship of "immoral" publications, artwork, and depictions.

political incompetency of Count Caprivi, and of the necessity of recalling Prince Bismarck or, at any rate, of making constituting him grand referee to be consulted ~~when difficult~~ as often as complications arise.

Of the present feelings of the general public – whether they now regret the rejection and the dissolution – it is impossible to speak yet with certainty. The situation will not be much affected by the Emperor's address to the military at the Tempelhof review.⁶⁵ His language ~~which is construed as a threat~~ (which is marked by the usual maximum of imprudence) may be acceptable to Junker sentiment/Prussian Junkers please the parties of "Throne and Altar", but ~~will be~~ may be interpreted by the liberal parties Opposition as an attempt to influence dictate to the electorate by irregular means by the Crown.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/178 (final).*

George Strachey to Earl of Rosebery, No. 19, Dresden (May 20, 1893)

The election campaign activities of Saxony's many political parties, including the Social Democrats, are described here. By contrasting German practices with the British style of campaigning, Strachey exaggerates the somnolence of the 1893 Reichstag election campaign in Saxony, which began when the German Reichstag was dissolved on May 6.

The outward signs of popular excitement visible after a Dissolution of the House of Commons are almost unknown in Germany. There is no general absorption in the one overpowering interest: the public seem rather to be playing at elections. Except in some of the larger towns, meetings are not held, and there is no systematic issue of addresses, or canvassing. The press notices of electoral preparations and incidents are very meagre; leading articles are heavy and uninformative, and, above all, where persons are discussed, full of the timidity natural to journalists who have to write with one eye on the Libel, and 'Hatred and Contempt', paragraphs of the Criminal Code.⁶⁶

To all this the Social-Democrat[s] offer an honorable contrast. Their activity is praised by their opponents, who wonder ~~aghast~~ at their perfect

65 In an address of May 9, 1893, Kaiser Wilhelm II stated that, if the newly elected Reichstag rejected the government's Army Bill again, he would be prepared to make every effort to see it through. As Strachey notes, this was considered to be a veiled threat against the Reichstag's prerogatives.

66 Strachey is referring to §§130–1 and §§185–200 of the Imperial Criminal Code.

organisation, their devotion to their flag, and their intrepidity in calling things and individuals by plain names.

In each of the 23 constituencies of the Kingdom the Socialists have their man ready for the contest; while, on the side of “order”⁶⁷ the hunt for willing and capable candidates is still proceeding, and, in places, under very adverse conditions.

~~When the elections are terminated on the 15th of June next, on what political platforms will the new members for the kingdom stand? This question will, as a rule, be unanswerable, except for the occupants of Social-Democratic seats. The parties & fractions of the late Reichstag are not represented here in their full variety; but I can at present count ten separate programmes. In many districts, a Conservative, a National Liberal, perhaps an anti-Semite or Liberal-Unionist and a Social-Democrat will go to the poll. There will be no absolute majority, whereupon a casting [run-off] election must take place, when there will be a coalition of ‘Throne and Altar’ against the Socialist.~~

The ‘freisinnig’ [Radical] leader, [Theodor] Barth, lately argued that there would be no enlightened public opinion in Germany as long as there was no parliamentary Government.⁶⁸ It would be more accurate to say that such Government cannot exist where the parliament is split up into above a dozen parties.

Nearly all the factions of the late Reichstag have their equivalents here; for instance, the Dresden electorate have before them ten separate programmes. According to present announcements, the local candidate of ‘Throne and Altar’ will be a master-glazier,⁶⁹ who belongs to the ‘Tivoli’⁷⁰ wing of the Conservatives, and therefore combines reactionary German Toryism and anti-Semitism in their most malignant forms. The liberals must support [the Conservative candidate] Herr [Eduard] Wetzlich, or the representation will fall into Social-Democratic hands. But, as above explained, the various platforms are not yet fully organized, and I need

67 Strachey alludes here to the Saxon Kartell of “parties of order” (*Ordnungsparteien*).

68 Theodor Barth (1849–1909) was a left-liberal German politician and publicist. When the German Radical Party split in 1893, he joined the rival Radical Union (*Freisinnige Vereinigung*). He founded *Die Nation* in 1883 and edited it until his death. Strachey is probably referring to Barth’s article “*Die Sackgasse*” (The Impass), published in *Die Nation*, Nr. 32, May 6, 1893.

69 Eduard Wetzlich, a master glazier and *Rentier*, sat on Dresden’s municipal council and also belonged to the State Association of Saxon Conservatives.

70 Referring to the antisemitic factions in the German Conservative Party that forced through a new party program at the Tivoli Congress on December 8, 1892. For the antisemitic and anti-socialist clauses in the revised program, see *GHDI*, vol. 5, sec. 5.

hardly add that the results of the Saxon polls of next Thursday three weeks are altogether beyond calculation.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft, no. 18a), FO 68/178 (final, no. 19).*

George Strachey to Earl of Rosebery, No. 19, Dresden (June 10, 1893) (draft)

This report narrows the focus of analysis to concentrate on the various parties' election struggles to win one of Dresden's seats in the Reichstag. Strachey describes the issues on which local antisemites are trying to get elected, noting that the two main antisemitic parties – the German Social and the German Reform parties – cannot even cooperate. The latter accused the former of being too close to the German and Free Conservative parties that dominated Dresden and Saxon politics.

The semi-official lists of the late Reichstag classified the members in eleven separate parties & groups. There are now sixteen programmes before the German electorate, of which eight are under discussion here, the maximum number of candidatures for any one of the twenty-three Saxon seats being four.

The Army Reform is not the hinge on which the local elections of next Thursday will turn. The cardinal question for the constituencies of the Kingdom is – how can the sixteen seats till lately held in Saxony by the supporters of 'throne and altar' be maintained against Social- Democracy?

At the general elections of 1887 and 1890, the Conservatives of both species, with the National-Liberals, supported at the casting polls [run-off ballots] by the 'freisinnig' [Radical] party, gave a solid coalition vote, by which the Socialists were outweighed. But political disintegration has since made such progress, that a reliable renewal of the old alliances is now very difficult to attain. The majority of the late members have declined to stand again, and the arrangements for the new candidatures of 'order' have mostly fallen into the hands of Conservatives of the Berlin 'Tivoli' type, whose extreme views are unacceptable to the liberal electorate, and even to a portion of the moderates of their own connexion. Again, the Anti-Semites, whose separate strength in 1890 was insignificant, are now a power with which politicians have to count, and their left wing, now organized apart as 'Reformers', refuse to cooperate with the Conservative coalition, whose wire-pullers they call ignorant, cringing, aristocrats, with none but their own class interests at heart. Not only so, but the 'Reformers', who are mainly small tradesmen and artisans,

have brought forward candidates of their own whose highly accentuated denunciations of Jews, capitalists, and government hacks, although associated with strong professions of loyal attachment both to the Saxon and the Imperial Crown, have been absurdly described as shewing a demagogic tendency.

This sketch of the Saxon electoral situation does not include all the sources of influence and intrigue: e.g. I have said nothing of the new ‘Landlords Union’,⁷¹ which has brought pressure to bear in the Kingdom. Of the state of things described, the contests for Dresden Altstadt and Neustadt are typical.⁷² These two seats have hitherto been occupied by ~~personages of considerable/high professional~~ members of suitable ability and personal distinction:⁷³ the new candidates are mediocres, or zeros, without any known political antecedents.

For Dresden-Altstadt the Syndicate of the parties of ‘Order’ have selected, or accepted, Herr [Eduard] Wetzlich, a master-glazier, and member of the Stadtrath; in the Neu-Stadt, where there is a strong sub-urban Conservative vote, they have set up an ~~utterly~~ obscure judicial-assessor, ~~or as we might say ‘Englice’,~~ deputy-police magistrate.⁷⁴ Herr Wetzlich is for the increase of the army, the costs to be mainly defrayed by taxes on champagne, carriages, evening-parties, & other luxuries, the Stock-Exchange included. He argues that unproductive military expenditure adds to the national wealth, demands the maintenance of the ‘Christian cosmical Conception’, and the exclusion of Jews from all places of municipal and civil employment; calls for the prohibition of cheap bazaars, hawkers, cooperative stores, purchases by instalments, & the rest of the reactionary programme, political & economic, of the Conservatives and anti-Semites.

Herr Wetzlich’s Neustadt colleague [Martin Rosenhagen] takes a similar line. The candidatures of [both] is supported by the Deutsch-Sozialen proper, or original anti-Semites, but are opposed by the ‘Reformers’, who

71 *Bund der Landwirte* (Agrarian League).

72 The fifth and fourth Saxon electoral districts, respectively.

73 The incumbent for Dresden-Altstadt was Theodor Hultzsch (see earlier notes). In 1890 he had been the “Cartel” candidate, with the support of the antisemites. The incumbent for Dresden-Neustadt was Heinrich Hermann Klemm (1816–99), a senior appellate court judge in Dresden. Klemm was a Reichstag deputy (1884–93) and a member of the Saxon *Landtag*’s lower chamber (1889–93) for Dresden’s fifth district.

74 Strachey refers here to Martin Rosenhagen. In Dresden-Neustadt, the Conservative-antisemitic vote was split between Friedrich Alfred Klemm (b. 1855), a Dresden businessman who ran under the banner of the antisemitic Reform Party, and Rosenhagen, a landowner, district court judge, and co-founder of the Association of German Students, who was a candidate of the German Conservative Party.

denounce the old superannuated parties for their ignorance of popular requirements, political nullity, and disquieting inherent servility. The Army Bill, they say, is a secondary question: Germany's danger is not from enemies abroad, but from Mammon & Manchester at home. The Empire wants solid checks on the Red & the Golden International,⁷⁵ and legislation to protect shopkeepers & hand-workers against the Jews [and] the various modern inventions by which competition plunders society and delivers up whole classes to the mercies of the Jews. For the centre of such a movement, Saxony, with her wise and just monarch, and enlightened Government, [is] specially indicated.

The 'freisinnige' [Radicals], who have little numerical or intellectual strength in Saxony, have candidates of their own, of whom the press reports next to nothing. Social-Democracy is surpassing itself in the ubiquity and assiduity of its agitation, and it has an inexhaustible supply of well-informed men with that capacity for argumentative public speaking which is so rare in Germany. Prudently veiling the Red Flag during the electoral period, its candidates talk sound, moderate, doctrine which would have the approval of any constituency in Great Britain. [Wilhelm] Liebknecht lately spoke here, and his politics would have been applauded by Sir Robert Peel, while every word of his Political Economy would have been endorsed by John [Stuart] Mill.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/178 (final).

George Strachey to Earl of Rosebery, No. 21, Dresden (June 20, 1893)

This report documents one of the salient features of the 1893 Reichstag election in Saxony: the Conservatives' dismal showing and the dramatic increase in antisemitic votes and seats won.

My last [Despatch] explained the peculiar feature of the Saxon electoral situation, viz. the rise to importance of the ultra Anti-Semites. Thursday's polls shewed that the upheaval of the 'Reformers' had dislocated the old political strata. They indicated the collapse of the Coalition of 'Order' and the complete break up of the Conservatives. Next to East. [i.e., eastern] Prussia this Kingdom has always been the main citadel of the extreme German Right. Saxony has 23 seats in the Reichstag. At the elections of 1890, the Conservatives took, at once, 10

75 That is, socialist and Jewish internationalism.

of these seats, to which they added 3 at the casting [run-off] polls. On Thursday, they only succeeded in 3 constituencies. They may possibly gain 2 more at the second ballots, making their new total 5 against 13 in 1890.

The [antisemitic] Reformers have carried 1 seat, and their polls have been so large that they may, at the final contests, make a group of 5 or 6 members. The portion of the local middle parties cannot be appraised yet. The Social Democrats have carried all their old seats: their polls have augmented, but not in the portentous proportion observed between the elections of 1887 and 1890.

A few examples will give reality to the above generalizations. I have already enlarged on the character of the contests for the capital. On Thursday, the aggregate 'Order' vote in Dresden-Altstadt was larger than in 1890; but the Conservative-Deutschsozial candidate, [Eduard] Wetzlich, was utterly ~~defeated~~ crushed, making less than half the 'Reformer's' poll. In Dresden-Neustadt, this process was repeated. Again, the adjoining circle [district] of Meissen has always been the bulwark of the Saxon Conservatives: here, the head of the party,⁷⁶ a notable member of the Reichstag, succumbed in the same manner, and his vacancy, like the Dresden seat will be disputed by a 'Reformer' and a Social Democrat. So in this stronghold of 'throne & altar', till now thought impregnable, where the Conservative poll has fallen from 14,500 to 4,400, all the missing votes having been annexed by a 'Reformer'.

On the whole, this Kingdom cannot be said to have been much impressed by the recent official exhortation of the Berlin 'Reichsanzeiger' to the electorate to vote for 'God, the Emperor, & the Empire'. In the last German Parliament the Saxon contingent included 15 'Ja-Männer', i.e. members always ready to say ditto to Government proposals. In the new house, the group with such proclivities may probably muster 7 or 8 strong. The eventual behavior of the 'Reformers' must remain altogether conjectural, until they have shown their general practical hand, and are organized as a parliamentary fraction [i.e., caucus].

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/178 (final).

76 Baron Heinrich von Friesen-Rötha (1831–1910), who represented the seventh Saxon district of Meißen-Großenhain from 1887 to 1893. He had been chairman of the State Association of Saxon Conservatives since 1883 but resigned that post in 1894 amid financial difficulties. He was succeeded by General Consul Max Schober, but de facto leader of Saxon Conservatives from 1894 to 1918 was Paul Mehnert (see earlier notes on him).

Table 11. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1893

	June 15, 1893		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
Saxony			
Conservatives	147,772	24.9	6
National Liberals	49,554	8.4	2
Left Liberals	30,203	5.1	2
Antisemites (German Reform Party)	93,364	15.8	6
Social Democrats	270,654	45.7	7
Total votes cast / seats	594,506		23
Voter turnout rate (%)	79.9		
Reich			
German Conservatives	1,038,353	13.5	72
Free Conservatives	438,435	5.7	28
National Liberals	996,980	13.0	53
Left Liberals	1,091,677	14.2	48
Antisemites	263,861	3.4	16
Social Democrats	1,786,738	23.3	44
Total votes cast / seats	7,702,265		397
Voter turnout rate (%)	72.5		

Source: Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 265 (and for explanatory notes).

Note: Some parties have been omitted for the sake of clarity.

George Strachey to Earl of Rosebery, No. 23, Dresden (June 29, 1893) (draft)

The run-off elections in Saxony produced still further defeats for Conservatives (see table 11). Strachey reports that the political attitude of the newly elected antisemites is a source of concern: they are unlikely to provide reliable support to the Reich government in Berlin.

At the casting elections in this kingdom, the Anti-Semites were successful in 6 of the 12 constituencies polled. The Conservatives held 2 more of their original seats; the Free Conservatives dwindled from 3 to 1; the National-Liberal lost, and the Freisinnig [Radical] party gained, each 1 seat: The Social Democrats had no further victories, and are now as they were at the dissolution.

The definite parliamentary result is as follows. In the last Reichstag there were 15 Saxon Conservatives & National Liberals, who, much as they desired a return to "the old course" were always ready, after a certain pretence of criticism and resistance, to submit to the demands of the

Imperial Government. The corresponding group now consists of only 8 members. The intentions of the 6 Anti-Semites who, with one exception, are ‘Reformers’ cannot be defined yet. Some of them bid for the Conservative vote at the casting polls by vaguely undertaking to support, with certain limitations, the proposed Army Reform, and they may perhaps act up to their professing. But as ‘Reformers’ have declared war to the knife⁷⁷ against Commercial Treaties, and have denounced the whole system of nineteenth century Economics, their presence in the Reichstag may seriously aggravate the difficulties of Count Caprivi’s position. A fraction [caucus] mustering nearly 20 members, who represent the Tory-Democracy of the Empire, and ~~have been elected under the flag of ‘no more spinal-crouching to aristocrats and officials’~~ the principle of ‘no more spinal prostration’, will be a new & troublesome Parliamentary factor.

In Dresden the two Reformers⁷⁸ defeated their Socialist competitors: in Leipzig a National-Liberal⁷⁹ obtained a similar victory. The successful candidate would, in each case, have been hopelessly defeated, if the various partizans of ‘order’ had not given their former antagonists strong support.

Taken as a whole, the Saxon elections indicate the existence of deep dissatisfaction with the old parties & their programme and, in general, the unpopularity of the ‘new course’. Of a recrudescence of ‘Particularism’, or Home-Rule tendencies, there is no trace whatever. The forces which disturb the political orbit of the Empire are not centrifugal – Germany gravitates without interruption to the centre.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40.

George Strachey to Earl of Rosebery, No. 45, Dresden (December 9, 1893) (draft)

Social Democrats continue to win election to the Saxon Landtag, despite the three-mark tax threshold for enfranchisement. In contrast to the early

77 Strachey alludes to the common German phrase “*Kampf bis aufs Messer*,” which can also connote a “fight to the finish.”

78 Friedrich Klemm in Saxony’s fourth Reichstag district, Dresden-Neustadt, with a run-off victory (56.3 per cent) over the Social Democrat August Kaden; Oswald Zimmermann in the fifth Reichstag district, Dresden-Altstadt, with a run-off victory (55.1 per-cent) over the Social Democrat Georg Gradnauer. As Strachey notes, in both cases the SPD candidate had a relative majority on the first (main) ballot.

79 Ernst Hasse (1846–1908), a Leipzig statistician, was chairman of the Pan-German League (founded 1891) until his death.

1880s, this time they have nominated a socialist candidate in all but one of the districts where elections are being held. Strachey also reports on the conservatism and pliability of the Saxon Landtag.

The Legislature of the [Saxon] Kingdom assembled recently for the biennial meeting. Preliminary to each session one third of the members of the lower house vacate their seats, for which new elections are held. The suffrage is direct: the qualification is the payment of 3 Marks in taxes, or, otherwise stated, the possession of annual money income, or its equivalent, of £30. At the recent partial appeal to the constituencies there was a repetition of the main feature of the late election to the German Parliament. The alliances of the parties of "Order" were much frustrated by the independent candidatures of the new Anti-Semites, or 'Reformers', who made large polls to the damage of the Conservatives & National Liberals. The Saxon elections follow our own rule of the absolute majority,⁸⁰ and the intrusion of 'Reformers' in places where their own following was weak helped the Social Democrats, in various constituencies.... The subversives contested no less than 32 of the 33 vacancies, their relative gain was 2 seats, and they now count one-sixth of the lower house (82 members), in which, a few sessions back, they were not represented at all. The Conservatives are weakened; the Nat. Libs stronger than before; some defeats were suffered by the ~~Radicals~~ so-called Progressists – in Saxony an inconsequential faction, where principles are a mere dilution of the ideals of the divided group of German 'Freisinnige' & their abund[ant] allies of the ~~South-German~~ Southern People's Party.

Of the elected and nominated delegates of the Upper House, not one can be properly called a Liberal: in the Lower House the supporters of 'Throne and Altar' of all categories are fully five-sixths of the whole. Every Saxon in the service of the Crown is necessarily a Conservative – with perhaps less prejudice than the aristocracy of Brandenburg & Pomerania but also with lower intelligence natural gifts, and far more servility of mind & habit. If Mr. Balfour & W. Mathews were in Saxon Chambers they would probably gravitate to the Social Democrats, whose arguments in debate are much less Utopian than those of some of their opponents.

A vote hostile to the Government on a fundamental point is not within the realm of possibility. Ministers shew considerable consideration in debate [*sic*] to the view of the majority; but when criticism of their plans reaches a certain point, they speak with accent, the house comprehends, the President, who is a violent Conservative partisan, sharply calls to

80 That is, a relative, not absolute, majority sufficed for election, as long as it exceeded one-third of all votes cast; hence run-off ballots were seldom needed.

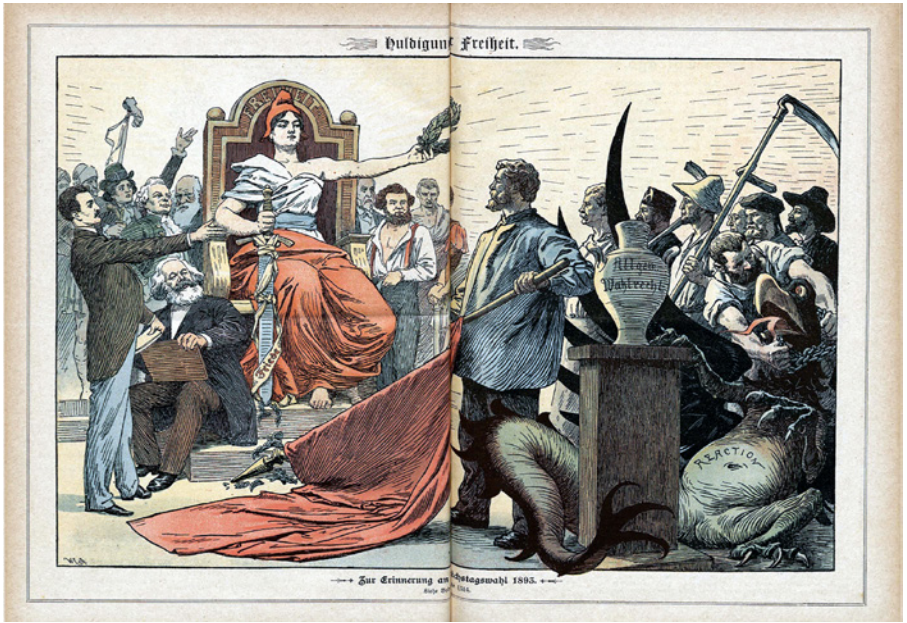


Figure 23. “Homage to Freedom. In Commemoration of the Reichstag Election of 1893.” This illustration is by Hans Gabriel Jentzsch (1862–1930), who joined the staff of the socialist journal *Der Wahre Jacob* in 1891. For almost thirty years Jentzsch was considered by readers as its most popular caricaturist. The centre of this image is dominated by an iconic Social Democratic worker with a red flag. He is surrounded by other references to Social Democracy’s invincibility in the first Reichstag elections (1893) since expiry of the Anti-Socialist Law. On the left we see Karl Marx, Ferdinand Lassalle, Charles Darwin, and perhaps a French *philosophe* or revolutionary. To the right of the throne stands Robert Blum, a martyr of the 1848 Revolution. The urn at centre right – into which election ballots would be placed – is labelled “universal suffrage,” and at far right another worker is slaying the dragon of “reaction.” “Liberty” is inscribed across the top of the throne and the banner of “peace” winds around a sword. The tip of the flagstaff has shattered a chain, and the woman holding the laurel wreath (the only female figure in the entire scene) wears a red Phrygian cap, symbolizing revolutionary France.

Source: “Huldigung der Freiheit,” *Der Wahre Jacob* (Stuttgart), Bd. 10, Nr. 183 (July 29, 1893): 1516–7 / Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.

order any Social Democrat who may interrupt the harmony of debate, until the Bills are registered, as it were in a *Lit de Justice*,⁸¹ with maybe sixty Ayes to ten Noes. It is hardly necessary to add that the repression of high political topics and contentious business in the local legislatures of the Empire is the result of that gradual extinction of Home Rule⁸² which is the feature of the German political evolution.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/40.

George Strachey to Earl of Rosebery, No. 15, Dresden (February 23, 1894)

Saxons are dismissive of Great Britain's "tolerance" of subversives who use dynamite, as Strachey reports by citing Dresden newspapers.

One of the sources of the antipathy to British policy and institutions visible in this Empire is our tolerance of public advocacy, by anarchists and others, of crimes of violence against society and individuals. The new dynamite incidents have suggested fresh comments in this sense, which may remind old diplomatists of the judgments on us current on the Continent towards the beginning of the second half of the century.

The official Dresden 'Journal' writes, that "looking to the audacity and openness with which these murderous ruffians are allowed to operate in London, it is amazing that the Police should know so little of their ways. In one of the busiest quarters of London, the so-called 'advanced' Socialists, and anarchists, have their clubs" &c. The 'Journal' goes on to quote a Munich paper, which enlarges on the same theme: – "England is the land of liberty, in which the populace are masters, and right-minded citizens slaves. * * * * [sic]. England has become the rallying point of the scum of all nations, and has been hitherto mostly spared anarchical outrages as being the friendly host of these scoundrels. The British rights of freedom and asylum are thus a danger to the whole world." In like strain the [Dresdner] 'Anzeiger'. "The Continent would have no objection to England being a tower of refuge for the anarchists, if the English gentry

81 In France under the ancien régime, the *lit de justice* was a particular formal session of the *parlement* of Paris, under the presidency of the king, for the compulsory registration of the royal edicts.

82 By which Strachey means particularist sentiment and the preservation of states' rights in Imperial Germany.

would kindly prevent this safe asylum being used for the preparation and execution of criminal attempts on other countries.”

...

P.S. To day's 'Anzeiger' quotes a violent tirade from the "Kölnische Zeitung"⁸³ which calls London a den of international criminals and asserts that "His Excellency the Minister of the Interior" is tolerant to assassins, & the rest, "because the Cabinet has only a wretched majority of 40 votes" [in the Westminster Parliament] &c. &c.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/179.

George Strachey to Earl of Kimberley, No. 21, Dresden (May 5, 1894)

The May Day celebration has again passed peaceably in Dresden. This year, the SPD leadership issued no general guidance for demonstrations; hence, "the question of the observance of that day was treated in Saxony as a local matter." Strachey sarcastically observes that, on the day, rainy weather proved to be "a useful auxiliary to 'Throne and Altar'."

In Dresden, two early meetings were held, which were largely attended by the working-class, where speeches were made on the significance of the International 'Feast of Labour', and appropriate resolutions passed. In the afternoon, a procession of about 6000 persons – very many of them women and girls – chiefly recruited from the suburbs and neighbourhood, advanced through some of the principal thoroughfares of the city, finally separating into groups, which proceeded to various places of popular entertainment, where there was more oratory, sustained by performances of music. At one point of its road, the procession was stopped by the police – apparently to keep the crowd from approaching the gas-works – and obliged to march for a short distance through side-streets. But no collision occurred and the column advanced with military order, only disturbed by the rain which, on this occasion, was a useful auxiliary to 'Throne and Altar'.

It is a prevalent German belief that the repression of subversive doctrines is largely attained if the details of the propaganda are dropped by the respectable press. Accordingly, the knowledge of the proceedings of Social-Democracy and of the labour movement which reaches the Dresden public is a minimum. On this occasion, the journals have scarcely departed from

83 An influential newspaper with national circulation, sympathetic to National Liberal and Free Conservative views.

their usual rule, so that of the ‘Feast of Labour’, as kept in the provinces [i.e., outside the cities], nothing can be said, except that its observance, where occurring at all, was in the tranquil manner above described.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/179.

George Strachey to Earl of Kimberley, No. 26, Dresden (June 25, 1894)

The “parties of order” have tried to re-establish the old “Saxon Cartel” of anti-Social Democratic parties. Strachey believes the “Cartel” to be ineffective, offering a telling example to support his conjecture.

There was lately issued here an address signed by every member of the Saxon Legislature (the eleven Social Democrats, and two of the radicals, excepted) which was generally described as a new departure in politics. Social Democracy was strongly denounced in this manifesto, which laid down that the parliamentary candidatures of the subversive party would hereafter be combated by means of suitable electoral coalitions among the supporters of ‘Throne and Altar’.

Alliances of Conservatives & National Liberals, and of the last with the radicals [*Freisinnige*], are combinations too artificial to be reliable. At a [Reichstag] by-election in the manufacturing district of Plauen,⁸⁴ ... lately held by a Conservative official,⁸⁵ there came forward a Social Democrat,⁸⁶ a National Liberal,⁸⁷ a Reformer⁸⁸ (liberal anti-Semite) and a ‘freisinnig’ partizan.⁸⁹ At the first poll, the Social Democrat received 9919 votes [48.2 per cent], the united strength of his opponents being 10,666. His figure was thus inferior to the absolute majority, (or half of all plus one), so that another [run-off] contest was necessary.

The casting ballot was:

National Liberal	10,926.
Social Democrat	12,587 [53.5 per cent].

84 Saxony’s twenty-third electoral district in the southwestern corner of the kingdom.

85 Maximilian von Polenz (1837–1907), district governor in Plauen.

86 Alwin Gerisch (1857–1922), a millwright and party treasurer in Berlin. After serving as Reichstag deputy 1894–8 Gerisch again represented Plauen in 1903–7. He later filled important administrative roles in the SPD’s national executive.

87 A Herr Übel.

88 Max Schubert, a businessman and manufacturer in Chemnitz, who actually ran under the banner of the less radical antisemitic German Social Party.

89 Arnold von Schwarze, a manufacturer in Plauen.

This victory of the subversives was the more brilliant, as the legitimate parties had spared no expense during the contest, and had stumped the constituencies with an energy almost unexampled in Germany, having held above a hundred electioneering meetings. The Social Democratic Party in the Reichstag will now number, I think, 47 members, the equivalent of nearly 80 at Westminster. In 1871, their parliamentary contingent consisted of one member.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/179.

**George Strachey to Earl of Kimberley, No. 30, Dresden
(September 14, 1894)**

Anarchist murders of prominent statesmen in 1894 aroused calls in Germany – from the Kaiser down to municipal councillors – for a new line of defence against subversion, violence, and revolution. In the years 1894–6, various schemes were floated for a new Anti-Socialist Law, a coup d'état against the Reichstag and universal suffrage, or for other means to meet the perceived threat. Yet public opinion in Saxony is very unfavorable toward Kaiser Wilhelm II's strongly anti-socialist speech delivered in the East Prussian city of Königsberg during Sedan Day celebrations there. In this speech, Wilhelm also lashed out at radical agrarians – mainly Prussian Junkers – in the Agrarian League.⁹⁰ Since 1893 they had been opposing the reduction in grain duties that Chancellor Caprivi, with Wilhelm's approval, had made part of his legislative agenda.

The Emperor's speech at Königsberg is receiving such criticism in the press, and in conversation, as the provisions of the Criminal Code, and the watchfulness of the Public Prosecutors, allow. From the language used, as well as from the silence maintained in quarters where no opportunity for complimenting the leader of the Empire is lost, it is plain that an unfavorable impression has been produced.

The reproofs administered to the reactionary Junkers of East-Prussia have afforded a certain malicious satisfaction to free-traders and liberals of all grades. But it is felt that nobles and courtiers, however agrarian and obstructive, have a constitutional right to their opinion and votes, and that persistence in opposition, in spite of the displeasure of the Crown, instead of being, as the Emperor says, “a monstrosity”, is closely allied to virtues.

90 *Bund der Landwirte*, founded in February 1893.

Again, the doubt is expressed whether the Imperial reprimand, or even the exclusion of the recalcitrants from the Königsberg banquet by way of revenge, will have the desired effect in intimidation.

...

Further, the speech denounces Social-Democracy. But it is asked, is moral or material repression intended. If the latter, how is the necessary legislation to be pushed through the Reichstag?

On confidential criticisms I do not enlarge. They accentuate the above, and suggest the idea that the Emperor's last orations, like some of its predecessors, might, perhaps, better have remained unspoken.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/179.

George Strachey to Earl of Kimberley, No. 38, Dresden (October 17, 1894)

Whereas Saxony's government leader doubts that the Kaiser's call for action against Social Democracy can lead to a new Anti-Socialist Law, because the Reichstag would not approve it, he is in favour of other means of repression. Strachey has nothing positive to say about Metzsch's character or his ability to stand up to Prussian demands for strong action against "subversives."

Herr [Georg] von Metzsch informs me that he has had no intimation from Berlin of official intentions, Imperial or Prussian, relative to the legislative action against Social Democracy and Anarchism, on which there is so much conjecture in the German Press. His Excellency imagines, however, that Prussian proposals in that sense will shortly be laid before the Bundesrath. He thinks that there can be no question of a special repressive law on the pattern of the Bismarck act⁹¹ of 1878. Such a measure [believes Metzsch] would scarcely be entertained by the Reichstag, and, if passed, might probably, like its predecessor, augment the evil which it was expected to cure. The alternative system would be, a revision of the paragraphs of the Criminal German Code dealing with crimes against the State, the Constitution, official institutions, and persons, and the like. For this a parliamentary majority might be secured, and the means of combat against the subversive propaganda would be strengthened.

Herr von Metzsch is a bureaucrat, not a politician. He has no higher interest or ideals, no culture, has few opinions on public topics, and those

91 Anti-Socialist Law.

which he has he likes to hide. Though participating in the narrow instincts of his order, he has become aware – (under the influence, perhaps, of a former English connexion)⁹² – that at the close of the nineteenth century the old German methods for propping up “Throne and Altar” are out of date, while his personal temperament disposes him to prefer compromise to the gag. As to the advantage of legislation on the lines supposed, His Excellency, as Minister of the Interior, seems sceptical: approving or disapproving, he and his colleagues will follow their fixed rule of saying ‘ditto’ to any proposals which Prussia may submit to the Bundesrath.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/179.

**George Strachey to Earl of Kimberley, No. 44, Dresden
(November 15, 1894)**

Saxon public opinion reacts favourably to an explicit call for a coup d'état against the Reichstag by one of Bismarck's former press lackeys.

There was lately published at Leipsic a pamphlet⁹³ on the subversive parties by Dr Rössler,⁹⁴ formerly director of the Berlin ‘Literary Bureau’, the Government Office through which Prince Bismarck inspired the ‘reptile’ press of Germany, as for instance, in his campaign against the Emperor and Empress Friedrich.⁹⁵ Foreseeing that the Reichstag might be indisposed to comprehensive, effective, legislation against Social Democracy, the pamphleteer proposed a simple expedient by which coercion would be available in any desired degree. The constitution would be suspended, the Parliament, if recalcitrant, would be turned out of doors, and the Emperor, in conjunction with the Federal Council would assume supreme

92 On Metzsch, see the earlier note: Metzsch's former brother-in-law was Lord Goschen.

93 *Die Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin, 1894), by Constantin Rössler.

94 Constantin Rössler (1820–96). Despite liberal leanings in 1848–60, Rössler became known – along with Lothar Bucher and Moritz Busch – as one of Bismarck's “press bandits” (often described by Strachey as “reptiles” for their leading role in the “reptile press.”) Director of the Literarisches Büro (1877–90), Rössler was the anonymous author of the famous “War in Sight” article (1875) that set off an international crisis between France and Germany. The pamphlet that Strachey describes was likely popularized by Rössler's brother Guido, who was a book trader in Leipzig.

95 Kaiser Friedrich III, who ruled for ninety-nine days in 1888 before succumbing to throat cancer, and his wife.

power for a term of years, when the edicts necessary [*sic*] for the defense of society would be promulgated.

The Leipzig ‘Grenzboten’ (Free-Conservative)⁹⁶ has ridiculed this as chimerical, observing that the fact that such suggestions had been solemnly discussed by a portion of the German press proved the existence of a degraded state of feeling, and was a national disgrace. The Dresden public must, I presume, be well aware that the impending proposals⁹⁷ of the Imperial Government relative to Social Democracy exclude exceptional legislation on the pattern of the old Bismarck law. Nevertheless there is here a strong current of opinion in favour of policy which would, in effect, involve the perpetration of a coup d’État. At a local meeting which was largely attended by the aristocracy, military, civil officials, and private burghers, a Prussian Kammerherr⁹⁸ resident here, and well known as a rabid enthusiast on behalf of ‘throne and altar’, delivered an address on the lines of the above named pamphlet.

His ranting rhetoric was received with enormous applause throughout, which reached a maximum, when he recommended that all Socialists condemned under his prospective legislation should, after their punishment by imprisonment of home, be transported to the Bismarck Archipelago or the Cameroons, and kept under supervision there.

A petition from Dresden⁹⁹ urging drastic measures against the internal enemy, their deprivation of constitutional rights included, has received 80,000 signatures in the kingdom. To this, objections have been raised in National-Liberal quarters, and the declaration made, that the party will not countenance reactionary plans. It is, however, significant of Dresden feeling, that the National-Liberal [Dresdner] ‘Anzeiger’, the organ of the Town Council [*Stadtrat*], calls the speech just quoted a very statesman-like and important manifesto.

...

P.S. Since the above was written, the Prussian Kammerherr named has repeated his lecture at Leipzig, before a large assemblage of the partizans of Order, when a resolution was passed, declaratory of the determination

96 *Die Grenzboten*, October 18, 1894. In previous decades the *Grenzboten* had tended to reflect National Liberal opinion.

97 The reference here is to the “Subversion Bill” (*Umsturzvorlage*), which called for the amendment and amplification of the Imperial Criminal Code, the Military Penal Code, and the Press Law. The “Subversion Bill” was introduced to the Reichstag on December 5, 1894, but subsequently rejected by that body on May 11, 1895.

98 Apparently Werner von Blumenthal, on November 10, 1894.

99 Drawn up (July 3, 1894) by the Dresden Conservative Association, chaired by Paul Mehnert. On this petition and the general political ferment in Saxony and the Reich at this time, see Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 275–82.

of those present to support the Crown in its campaign against the propagators of subversive doctrines.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/179.*

**George Strachey to Earl of Kimberley, No. 48, Dresden
(December 15, 1894)**

Despite the strength of anti-socialist sentiment in Saxony, public opinion there is against the prosecution of Wilhelm Liebknecht for lèse-majesté, because he should enjoy immunity as a member of the Reichstag. This sentiment Strachey finds surprising.

The request to the Reichstag to permit the prosecution of Herr Liebknecht¹⁰⁰ has been widely disapproved here, except in quarters where official decorum prevents the expression, or formation, of personal judgments. It is to the credit of the local newspapers that none of them have separated themselves on this occasion from the press of the Empire: not even the subsidized Government ‘reptile’, the [Dresdner] ‘Journal’, has ventured to advocate the prosecution, or to pretend that a majority of the Reichstag was likely to decide in its favour. I have been surprised to find the ornamental classes indisposed to accept the principle of the assimilation of parliamentary offences to common crimes.

By the German aristocratic and official castes, Socialists and Liberals are habitually spoken of as dogs, or worse: I lately heard the Reichstag described, as an assemblage composed, if the Conservatives were excepted, of “mere blackguards”. – Still, such feelings do not exclude the recognition of the truth that if a Parliament is to exist, its discipline ought not to rest with the police.

Of the intelligent circles, the knowledge of a Diplomatist is never perfect, nor quite direct. I am assured, however, that the enlightened majority of the citizen class of this capital see with regret that the opening of “the newest course”¹⁰¹ has been marked by an unfortunate political blunder.

100 On December 6, 1894, Liebknecht and other members of the Social Democratic caucus in the Reichstag remained seated during cheers for the Kaiser. In a letter dated December 9, Chancellor Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (1819–1901) asked the Reichstag members to give their approval to Liebknecht’s prosecution on the charge of lèse-majesté. The request was voted down in the Reichstag session of December 15.

101 The reference here is both to the “new course” of Chancellor Caprivi from March 1890 until his dismissal in October 1894, and the “newest course” of Caprivi’s suc-

A Minister¹⁰² with no party at his back, without imposing antecedents or striking personal qualities, allows the Government to be drawn into a constitutional conflict calculated to divide the supporters of “throne and altar” into hostile camps, and to “bring water”, as the Germans say, “to the mill”¹⁰³ of the subversive parties! Such a beginning, it is urged, bodes no good. So many difficulties lie ahead – (some of them, for instance, the financial, are likely to prove insoluble on the terms proposed by the Imperial Government) – that the Reichskanzler’s proper course was to calm antagonisms[,] not to permit them to be roused.¹⁰⁴

To the gag the Germans are accustomed, and they accept it as a fundamental national institution. But to the classes here in question, its application to the Legislature is an absurdity against which they protest – as the German manner is, in silence.

In the face of the proposed “arrest of the six members”, the utter absence of an active public opinion may seem strange. If existing, it could attain, in Saxony at least, to no open expression, for meetings to discuss such a burning question would not be permitted. As regards the offence with which the Socialists are charged, I would say that German legal theory and practice afford a general basis to the view of the Berlin Public Prosecutors.

Schoolboys of ten or twelve years of age have been arrested for *lèse-majesté*: a person who good humouredly spoke of the Imperial babies as “little chaps” (Bengel) was recently indicted for the outrage. Not long since, some individuals who did not rise at a dinner when the Emperor’s health was drunk, were prosecuted and sentenced: this occurred [*sic*] in Saxony.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/179.*

cessor, Hohenlohe, German chancellor and Prussian minister president from 1894 to 1900.

102 Ernst von Köller (1841–1928) was Prussian minister of the interior who belonged to the reactionary wing of the German Conservative Party, representing it in the Reichstag during the 1880s.

103 The German phrase is “*Wasser auf seine Mühlen bringen*,” or “That’s all grist for his mill.”

104 Chancellor Hohenlohe, like his predecessors in office and many state ministers in Saxony, was ambivalent about whether Social Democrats should be provoked to street fighting and outright revolution. “Intervention against Social Democracy is necessary,” he wrote once, “but only if it provides a provocation.” Details in Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 280.

George Strachey to Earl of Kimberley, No. 1, Dresden (January 7, 1895)

The Conservatives in Saxony have no monopoly on anti-socialism. National Liberals in Leipzig, Strachey reports, also favour measures to clamp down on subversives with amendments to the German Criminal Code.

Even the sensational circumstances which preceded the late adjournment of the German Parliament failed to stir the electorate and its representatives to vitality. In this kingdom, the political silence has been observed as closely as elsewhere in the Empire. A slight exception to the prevalent lethargy has just been reported from Leipzig. The heads of the local National-Liberal party were at the trouble of discussing, at a private meeting, the measures against the Subversives. Their decision was, that the proposed ‘novel’¹⁰⁵ for the Criminal Code did not go far enough: that in particular, boycotting¹⁰⁶ should be made a criminal offence. But that the paragraph on the glorification of crimes must be so amended as to leave it permissible to express approval of the acts of Brutus and William Tell.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/180.

George Strachey to Earl of Kimberley, No. 8, Dresden (February 7, 1895)

The Social Democrats have just won a by-election in the sixth Saxon electoral district of Dresden-County. Strachey notes the likelihood that supporters of the SPD candidate extended beyond lower-class voters into the ranks of the middle classes.

On the occurrence in Germany of such incidents, it is the rule with the official and reactionary classes to saddle ‘the rascally freisinigs’ [Radicals] with the blame. On this occasion, however, no such excuse was available, as the Dresden radicals are a mere handful.... The immense polls of the party [SPD] are altogether unintelligible, except on the assumption that

105 That is, amendment.

106 In 1894 Social Democrats were boycotting large breweries not only because of rising beer prices but also as a means to make more taverns available to them for agitational purposes. See Eleanor L. Turk, “The Great Berlin Beer Boycott of 1894,” *Central European History* 15 (1982): 377–97; Bonnell, *Red Banners*, 87–9.

it derives powerful reinforcement from the middle social ranks, which, though not actively entertaining subversive aspirations, fully sympathize with the Collectivist doctrine in regard to Capital, and gladly gratify their dislike of the ruling classes by a secret vote.¹⁰⁷

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/180.

George Strachey to Earl of Kimberley, No. 12, Dresden (June 15, 1895)

Strachey reports his recent conversation with Saxon government leader Georg von Metzsch about the “almost unlimited powers of repression” already enjoyed by the police; yet Metzsch wants more tools to combat the Social Democratic threat.

I recently asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs [Metzsch] whether the rejection of the Anti-Subversives Bill had been followed by any discussion of the eventual attitude of the Allied Governments¹⁰⁸ toward the Socialists. His Excellency said that he had heard ‘nothing’ from Berlin on the subject: for the present, all that could be done was, to stretch the means already available under the Criminal Code and regional Police rules. I observed that here, in Saxony, the authorities had almost unlimited powers of repression: their control over associations and meetings was practically as good as absolute, and the severity of its enforcement was guaranteed by the temper of the local officials with whom, to a man, hostility to Social Democrats was a private, as well as a public, sentiment. Herr von Metzsch replied that all this was not enough: He wanted powers more extensive still – meaning the undisturbed right to apply the gag at discretion to the entire Socialist propaganda, spoken or written, to the exclusion of the existing facultative appeals, and of legal restraints on Government jurisdiction. I do not know that the Minister entertains the belief that Socialism can be extinguished by repression and persecution.

107 In June 1893, the antisemitic Reformer Felix Oskar Hänichen, a businessman, had narrowly defeated the SPD candidate Georg Horn in a run-off election. Horn was a glassworker, writer, editor, and member of Saxony’s lower chamber. When Hänichen laid down his mandate, a by-election was held on April 25, 1895. This time Horn won a narrow majority (50.6 per cent) on the first ballot, not mainly because middle-class voters supported him but because the anti-socialist vote was split. The Conservative candidate was an owner of a knight’s estate, Georg Andrä (23.1 per cent); the antisemitic candidate was Gustav Hartwig (26.2 per cent).

108 Governments of Imperial Germany’s federal states, represented in the Federal Council.

But, as so usual with German functionaries, he has an instinctive sympathy with compulsion in administration.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/180.

**George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 24, Dresden
(September 3, 1895)**

Strachey reports on Sedan Day festivities,¹⁰⁹ emphasizing the lack of chauvinism displayed in Saxony. Also, having documented the decline of Saxon particularism since his posting in Dresden in 1873, here Strachey pronounces his last word on the subject: "Particularism is dead: the people may almost be described as Germans first, Saxons afterwards."

The anniversary of Sedan has been kept throughout this kingdom with enthusiastic popular demonstrations and rejoicings. Of the processions and other open-air ceremonials, the displays of patriotic emblems and decorations, the musical performances, the addresses, the banquets, the illuminations, it may be said that they commemorated in a suitable manner the men and events to whom honour was to be paid. These jubilee proceedings had in no respect an official origin or character. From first to last they were organized by municipal and parochial bodies, private military societies, and mixed committees of management. No troops were present: the army was only represented by the veterans of the great war, for whom new charitable foundations were instituted. At one of the outdoor functions in this city the King was present; but he came without escort, less in his personality as sovereign, than as the comrade¹¹⁰ of the survivors of St. Privat and Beaumont,¹¹¹ to whom he addressed a few sentences of suitable sympathy and recognition.

The attitude of the Saxon public has again demonstrated what, perhaps, required no further proof – namely, [that] in none of the 26 States of the Empire is the new pan-Germanic spirit stronger than it is here. Particularism is dead: the people may almost be described as Germans first, Saxons afterwards. Of the large German jubilee literature I have seen enough to be able to say, that its characteristic has been, reasonable

109 See earlier notes on Sedan Day events, held each year on September 2.

110 As crown prince of Saxony in 1870, Albert (1828–1902, ruled 1873–1902) led Saxon military forces in the field, as he had in 1866.

111 Battles of Gravelotte (August 18, 1870) and Beaumont (August 30, 1870), in both of which Saxon forces played a significant role.

reserve and self-restraint.... There is truth in some remarks of the Dresden ‘Anzeiger’, that the “note” (sit venia verbo)¹¹² of this commemoration is: – ‘Deutschland über alles’.¹¹³ – Germany, that is, great in the glories of war, but greater in the conquest of her long desired “ideal good”, the Unity of the nation.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/180.*

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 25, Dresden (September 16, 1895)

Defeat of the so-called Subversion Bill in the spring of 1895 did not dampen the Kaiser's enthusiasm for repression of Social Democracy. Strachey remarks here on recent German prosecutions for lèse-majesté and on the Kaiser's overblown rhetoric against socialists on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Sedan Day.

Although the Emperor's habit of participating in political controversy is generally thought to be prejudicial to the interests and authority of the Crown, His Imperial Majesty's Stettin arraignments of Social Democracy,¹¹⁴ with the subsequent confiscations and arrests in Berlin, Leipsic, and other places, have been approved in Conservative and National-Liberal circles. It is characteristic of Germany, that the imputability of the articles of the [SPD's] “Vorwärts” is taken as proved, although of their particular contents not a word is known. As usual in such cases, the truth will never reach the public. Copies of the incriminated newspapers cannot be obtained. [T]he Editors and printers will be tried and condemned in secret sittings, of which no record will be divulged except a bare statement of the sentences passed. The republication of defamatory matter, even in the form of a liberal report of the proceedings in a Court of Justice, is not privileged here, but is equivalent to the original libel.

The language of the “Vorwärts” on the “high-holy”¹¹⁵ William I may have been reprehensible: so may that of the philosophical Berlin weekly,

112 Latin: “pardon the expression.”

113 English: “Germany above all” – first line of “Das Lied der Deutschen,” by Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1841).

114 In the imperial rescript issued at Stettin on September 8, 1895, Kaiser Wilhelm II referred to the Social Democrats as unpatriotic enemies.

115 “Sacrosanct” (*hochheilig*).

“Moral Culture”,¹¹⁶ seized yesterday for reference to the recent utterances of the reigning monarch. It is equally likely that the expressions used were such as in Italy, or England, or the United States, would, in similar circumstances, give no umbrage. Mere levity in speaking of a royal personage may constitute lèse-majesté, even when malicious intention is absent. What may be called Star-chamber trials¹¹⁷ for that crime are as frequent in Germany, or, at least, in Prussia, as they were in Rome under Tiberius. Schoolboys have been prosecuted for ‘Majestas’¹¹⁸: a familiar though friendly remark in the intimacy of private conversation on Princes in the nursery has set the law in motion: an eminent historian has been tried for scientific strictures on the policy of the Emperor’s remote ancestor, the “Great Elector”. The Public Prosecutor’s task is, in one respect, easy. The ‘Delator’¹¹⁹ of Tacitus is well-known here: the duty of “informing” is taught in the nursery and schoolroom, and is imposed, or, at any rate, not disapproved by the national codes of social and professional honour.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/180.*

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 30, Dresden (October 25, 1895)

Social Democrats have again made gains in Saxon Landtag elections. At the end of his report, Strachey notes that the three-mark tax threshold for enfranchisement for Landtag elections is a “powerful check on the parliamentary growth of the Social Democratic Party.” As the following reports show, however, the “parties of order” in Saxony felt compelled to legislate more extreme measures to keep Social Democracy in check. They also played the anti-Jewish card for electoral advantage.

The biennial elections for the partial renewal of the 2nd chamber of the Saxon Landtag took place last week.¹²⁰

116 *Ethische Kultur*, September 14, 1895, in an article titled “Der Kaiser und die Sozialdemokratie.”

117 Strachey is referring to the Court of Star Chamber, an early-modern English court of law, which became notorious for arbitrary decisions.

118 Law of *majestas*; this refers to the ancient Roman laws on treason.

119 Latin: “denouncer.” In his *Annales* Tacitus describes the role and abuse of *delatores*, during the reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero.

120 For a colour map showing the result of these one-third elections, see [map S.7.1](#) in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*. The results of the three partial elections of

The house consists of 82 members, one third of whom vacate their seats previous to each biennial session. Every Saxon subject proper who pays 3 Marks in annual direct taxation is an elector. The session lasts about six months, and is thus followed by a parliamentary vacation of a year and a half.

The result of the 27 recent contests is, that the “Parties of Order” are of the same strength in the Chamber as before, though with certain minor shiftings amongst themselves from left to right, while the “Subversives”, with the loss of one seat to balance a single gain, have not done more than hold their own. Things might have been otherwise if the constituencies had responded to the Emperor’s recent appeals to the nation to “man themselves” for the fight against the grand domestic foe, Social Democracy. Far from acting in this spirit, the partisans of “Throne and Altar” were slack in their electioneering, and their polling was on a very reduced scale. For instance, in the 2nd Dresden district there were only 7488 votes for a register of 17,715 [eligible] names: in the 3rd city district, 4576 votes with a register of 9340 [eligible electors].

Specially deaf to the Emperor’s calls were the Anti-Semites, generally known as Deutsch-Sozialen or Reformers. By setting up candidates of their own they drew away votes which would otherwise have fallen to the Conservatives, and thus helped the Social Democrats to maintain their ground. This action of the Reformers is denounced as highly criminal, on the ground that their candidatures were plainly hopeless.

The dozen fractions [caucuses] of the Reichstag are not all represented in each of the 26 states of the Empire, nor are the parties of the Imperial Parliament quite identical with those of the local Diets [*Landtage*]. For instance, in Saxony, the extreme right is not divided into “German” and “Free” Conservatives. Further, the Landtag contains “Saxon Progressists” who maintain in a very diluted edition, the doctrines of the extinct German ‘Fortschritt’. They are a weak and diminishing party, but have more root in the country than the local Progressists of the new Berlin and Breslau ‘freisinnig’ type, whose polls at the recent election were ridiculously small. A “Saxon Progressist” seat in Dresden was captured by the Social Democrats, while two ‘freisinnig’ [Radical] members failed to secure re-election, leaving their fraction unrepresented in the Landtag. This has given great satisfaction in Conservative and official circles, where

1889, 1891, and 1893 are shown in [map S.6.5](#) in the same volume. The Saxon SPD did not collect or publish membership figures before the turn of the century; but the 1890s was a decade of remarkable growth: between 1893 and 1896, membership in Leipzig’s five Social Democratic district associations almost doubled: see [figure S.7.1](#) in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*.

Herr [Eugen] Richter, with his quasi-English ideals, inspires more hatred than [August] Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht.

In the late contests, the Progressists, National Liberals, & Conservatives were allied together against the Social Democrats, the “Freisinnigen”, like the Reformers, mostly standing aloof, or opposing the nominees of the Coalition. The ‘order’ programmes were modified when necessary, so as to meet local requirements of compromise. In the country[side], the appropriate ‘Agrarian’ accent was employed, in the towns the National-Liberals and the Reformers were humoured. In Dresden II, the Conservative candidate successfully angled for the votes of the shopkeepers and gentry of the residence by adopting the Berlin ‘Tivoli’ programme of the ‘German’ Conservatives,¹²¹ with its Anti-Semitic denunciations of Jews, large capitalists, cooperative stores, middlemen, hawkers, and the Stock Exchange.

The Social Democrats stumped the constituencies with unflagging energy, contesting the whole of the 27 vacancies and holding numerous meetings at which the speakers were frequently gagged by the police for reflections on the institutions of the Empire, or on official persons and policy. In spite of their efforts, the Social Democrats will only muster 14 in the Chamber as before.¹²² Their polls were, on the whole, much larger than the counts in the same constituencies six years ago; but, as population and industry have grown since 1889, and electoral areas have been altered, the changes observed are not susceptible of accurate measurement, and it is doubtful if they are of great importance. A comparison of these partial elections with those which take place in the Kingdom for the Reichstag, shows that the small suffrage qualification of 3 Marks, which is the tax on an income of £35, is a powerful check on the parliamentary growth of the Social Democratic party.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/180.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 35, Dresden (December 9, 1895)

By this point in his reign, Kaiser Wilhelm II's archaic moral pronouncements and his claim that he would “smash” anyone (including Bismarck) who opposed him, rang hollow. Even in Saxony, defenders of “Throne

121 See earlier notes on the Conservatives’ Tivoli party congress in December 1892.

122 A fifteenth Social Democrat was added to their *Landtag* caucus in a by-election of February 1896.

and Altar” regret that the Kaiser seems to conceive his duties as “those of a party orator.”

The medieval element in the Monarch’s “Weltanschauung” is in itself calculated to arouse sympathy here [in Saxony]. But then, as the extreme partizans of “Throne and Altar” observe, His Imperial Majesty’s emphatic assertion of his “cosmical conceptions” unfortunately miss the mark.... [T]he Emperor’s menaces fall as mere *bruta fulmina*,¹²³ and, in no one instance they have hit the mark. Whether his persuasions or threats are addressed for the “horde” of Social Democracy, or to the Agrarian nobles of East Prussia [Prussia] and Brandenburg, not a single recalcitrant obeys, not a vote at the elections is affected. No one is “smashed up,” but prestige is lost to the throne.

I may take this opportunity of saying, that some recent speculations, or assertions, of the London ‘Spectator’ regarding an eventual resort by the Emperor to extra-constitutional methods of Government betray ignorance of the elements of the German political vocabulary and situation.¹²⁴

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/180.*

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 36, Dresden (December 14, 1895)

In late 1895, Prussia’s Minister of the Interior Ernst von Köller was orchestrating a series of spectacular and controversial raids against Berlin Social Democrats.¹²⁵ Saxon repression, Strachey reports, is less overt but just as ill-advised.

There have been no similar proceedings here. In Saxony, all associations and assemblages are under the unlimited control of the civil power, and Social Democracy is milder in behavior and speech than in Prussia. A few days ago, a meeting of operatives [workers] was dissolved by the police

123 Latin: the full phrase “*bruta fulmina et vana*” means “thunderbolts that strike blindly and in vain” and is attributed to Pliny the Elder.

124 Strachey here refers to an article entitled “The Threat of Repression in Germany” (November 30, 1895).

125 See Eleanor L. Turk, “The Berlin Socialist Trials of 1896: An Examination of Civil Liberty in Wilhelmian Germany,” *Central European History* 19 (1986): 323–42; cf. Marven Krug, “Reports of a Cop: Civil Liberties and Associational Life in Leipzig during the Second Empire,” in *Saxony in German History*, ed. James Retallack (Ann Arbor, 2000), 271–86.

because a speaker had used ‘subversive and revolutionary language’. I found, on enquiry, that he had remarked, historically and abstractly, without going into particulars, that the power of kings had been founded on ‘murderous-robbery and plunder’.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/180.

**George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 14, Dresden
(February 28, 1896)**

By November 1895, the lower house of Saxony's state parliament, numbering 82 Landtag deputies, included fourteen Social Democrats. Despite the three-mark tax threshold for enfranchisement, in place since 1868, more and more working-class Saxons had become eligible to vote (in part because of rising wages, in part because of inflation). And those workers were electing Social Democratic candidates with increasing frequency (and determination). The anti-socialist “parties of order” in November 1895 decided to strike back. After Berlin's efforts at repression since 1894 had failed or been undercut by liberal doubts, the Saxons saw Landtag suffrage reform as a counter-strategy to meet the threat of revolution. In the future, they knew, the Social Democratic caucus in the Reichstag would continue to grow under the conditions of universal manhood suffrage; but these anti-democrats believed the three-class suffrage would, as it did in Prussia, safeguard their own state parliament from being “flooded” by enemies of the existing state and social order.¹²⁶ They were right. But note the range of opinions about the socialist “danger” cited by Strachey: whereas Conservative and liberal politicians claim that Social Democrats “pollute” the Landtag, public opinion regards the presence of socialist deputies to be a “nuisance.”

After the opening of the present session of the Saxon Landtag, the Socialists brought forward their biennial resolution in favour of an electoral reform. Under the existing system, the right to vote is contingent on the payment of three marks direct taxes, a census [*“Zensus”*], whereby the lower strata of society used to be practically excluded from the polls. But in 1874 the franchise was brought within the reach of those classes by the adoption of the income tax, the three mark stage of which corresponds with a yearly income of from £30 to £35, an amount fully covered, on the

126 For context and further details on this de facto coup against a relatively democratic parliamentary suffrage law, see Retallack, *Red Saxony*, ch. 7.

average, by the annual receipts of an operative [worker] in fair employment. After that date the representatives of labour began to appear in the Diet [*Landtag*], and in 1877 a Social-Democrat was returned: that party, which received a fresh addition to its numbers last week, now counts 15 members in a house of 82, the equivalent of about 120 in our House of Commons.

Replying to the Socialist motion above named, the Conservatives brought forward a counter-resolution in favour of a modification of the existing electoral system in a reactionary sense, which was accepted by the entire House, the Socialists alone dissenting. On this the Government brought in a law for the abolition of the direct suffrage, in favour of a machinery of indirect triple election, borrowed, with certain temperaments [i.e., modifications], from the Prussian method of group voting described by Prince Bismarck as the worst parliamentary constitution in the world.

The details of the Bill will now come under debate: they are at present hardly comprehensible, and as to their application, or the probable results of the reform, no two experts are agreed. The Conservatives, and a majority of the Liberals, assert that when the electorate is consulted by the triple indirect method Social Democracy will cease to pollute the chamber. On the other hand the minority, supported by a limited number of Leipzig Professors and various personages of weight, are raising protests against what they call the “plutocratic reaction” which is to enable one fifth of the electorate to render the voice of the remainder null and void.

While the Social-Democratic members, agitating with their usual vigour at public meetings, and otherwise, are discussing the idea of a wholesale resignation of their seats in the Chamber as a reply to the contemplated outrage on popular rights. The dominant opinion of the constituencies is hardly perceptible as yet: if the average elector hesitates before the reactionary character of the proposed legislation, he sees in the presence of 15 Social Democrats in the *Landtag* a political nuisance, which may grow into a danger, and ought to be abated.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/181.

**George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 25, Dresden
(May 30, 1896)**

The Landtag Suffrage Reform Bill was enacted on March 28, 1896. It took effect on May 5, 1896, and remained in place until another suffrage

reform was passed in 1909. As Strachey reports, Social Democrats were unsure how to react to what they called “suffrage robbery.”

I have reported the circumstances under which the Saxon Government laid before the Landtag of the Kingdom a Bill for the modification of the suffrage by the adoption of the system of indirect election. A minority of the constitutional left, which had some support in industrial circles, and amongst the Professors of the University of Leipsic, continued to denounce [*sic*] the Bill. But their attempts to rouse the constituencies to effective protests against interference with the existing electoral system were unsuccessful, and it was plain that approval of the proposed change was by no means confined to Conservative politicians. Finally, the Bill was carried, in a slightly amended form, through the lower Chamber of the Diet by a large majority – (56 against the 15 Social Democrats & 7 other members) – in the upper house by an unanimous vote.

On the side of Social-Democracy, there was wide divergence of opinion as to the course which it might be advisable to pursue. A conclave held at Leipsic¹²⁷ recommended that the party should, by way of protest, resign all its seats in the Landtag, and likewise entirely abstain from the polls at the next election. The policy of mere negation was, however, rejected by a general congress¹²⁸ held in Dresden, which adopted resolutions opposed to the Leipzig vote, and pledged the Social-Democratic leaders and electorate, to maintain their political activity on the old lines. It was further agreed that the programme of the party must henceforth include systematic agitation for the recovery of the popular rights infringed by the abolition of the direct suffrage.

There seems no certainty how the change will work. According to some prominent Conservatives, the Social-Democracy of the Kingdom has received a blow from which it will not recover. On the other hand one of the ministerial personages¹²⁹ who introduced the Bill told me privately that he should be satisfied if its result was to prevent the extreme left from receiving accessions to their actual parliamentary strength. Of the Social-Democrats, some take an optimist, some a pessimist view of the new situation. Many of them argue that the so-called reform, being a measure of persecution must have the usual moral effect of oppressive

127 On March 30, 1896.

128 It convened on April 7–8, 1896.

129 Most likely Saxon government leader Count Georg von Metzsch, who, together with the “leading Conservative wire-puller,” Paul Mehnert, orchestrated the suffrage revision of 1896.

legislation, that is, there will be a reaction in favour of the party which it is intended to crush.

It may be of interest to compare the above with the situation in the Grand Duchy of Baden, where, according to the public journals, the Government desires a change, in the Conservative direction, of the existing representative system, but sees no prospect of the apposite measures being adopted by the Diet.

Source: The National Archives, FO 68/181.*

PART IV

1898–1909

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Georg Strachey retired on July 1, 1897, and departed Dresden for England. He had served for twenty-four years as Britain's envoy to the Kingdom of Saxony and forty-five years in the diplomatic corps overall. His successor was Sir Condie Stephen,¹ who was appointed as minister resident at the courts of Saxony and the duchies of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. Stephen presented his credentials to the court only in September 1897, leaving a gap in British reportage just as Anglo-German relations became fraught over such issues as naval construction and the Boer War. Serving from 1897 until he retired on a pension on October 15, 1901, Stephen divided his time between the British legations in Dresden and Coburg; his reports to London were far less frequent and much less insightful than those of his predecessor Strachey. For example, he offered no commentary on the general Reichstag elections of June 1898.² His reports concentrated instead on "orgies of Anglophobia"³ in Dresden and Saxony during the Boer War.

The relative paucity of reports from Dresden addressing the Social Democratic Party after 1897 argues for including despatches from Berlin – such as the following one – and from other German capitals.

Lord Hugh Gough⁴ to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 253, Berlin (October 17, 1899)

Lord Gough, at this time secretary of embassy in Berlin, reports on the SPD's annual congress, held this year in Hannover. August Bebel continues to have difficulty repelling the challenge of revisionism from Max Schippel and Eduard Bernstein.⁵

I have the honour to report that the sittings of the Socialist Assembly which have been held at Hanover during the last week came to a conclusion on Saturday evening last. The daily meetings appear to have been

1 Sir Alexander Condie Stephen (1850–1908), was a career diplomat who served in many parts of the world between 1877 and his appointment to the Kingdom of Saxony in 1897.

2 On the Reichstag elections of June 1898 and June 1903, see [table 12](#), below.

3 See Stephen's Report No. 10 (Confidential), Dresden (March 14, 1900), FO 68/301, The National Archives, which also noted insults being directed at British women on the streets of Dresden.

4 Hugh Gough, 3rd Viscount (1849–1919), secretary of embassy, Berlin (1896–1901). See the later note on Gough upon his appointment to the British legation in Dresden in October 1901.

5 On Bernstein and revisionism, see the "Historical Overview."

very fully attended, but do not seem to have given rise to much more than some very animated, not to say stormy, discussions upon the subject of a pamphlet recently issued by Herr Bernstein, which is looked upon as being hostile to the Marxist and other advanced theories, and upon what is called the “militarismus” question.

Herr Bebel was the foremost speaker both in attacking Herr Bernstein’s pamphlet, and in a bitter onslaught upon Herr Schippel who held that, as long as Germany was threatened by France and Russia, a standing army was a necessity and that the national militia called for by the Socialists would not suffice.

Herr Bebel managed to get orthodox motions passed in each case condemning the “heresies,” but he could not compass [accomplish] the expulsion of Herr Schippel which was asked for, and the new party [faction] which is more for the bettering of the lot of the labouring classes than for the “revolution” would appear to have made some way, although we are warned by the Socialist press organs that, though they may fight among themselves, they will stand shoulder to shoulder in the coming struggle.

Source: The National Archives, FO 64/1471.⁶

**Sir Frank C. Lascelles⁷ to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 66, Berlin
(March 13, 1900)**

Britain’s ambassador to Germany discusses the dismissal of the unsalaried lecturer (Privatdozent) Leo Arons from the University of Berlin because he is a Social Democrat. The left-liberal journalist and politician Theodor Barth ridicules the decision as unworthy of German toleration at the turn of the century; he suggests it should be inscribed on the hide of an ass and sent to the Exposition Universelle of 1900 in Paris.

The dismissal from his post of Dr Leo Arons, a private teacher of the Physical Sciences at the University of Berlin, on the ground of his being a member of the Socialist party, has excited violent comments in the Liberal Press. The case has lasted nearly a year and has gone through the various stages of appeal. The Philosophical Faculty of the University of Berlin

⁶ Transcript provided to the author by Markus Mößlang.

⁷ Sir Frank Cavendish Lascelles (1841–1920) was a British diplomat who served in many British legations between 1879 and 1894. Thereafter he served briefly as ambassador to Russia and then, succeeding Sir Edward Malet, as ambassador to Germany from 1895 to 1908. He was knighted in 1886. Both Malet and Lascelles were judged by colleagues in the Foreign Office – and subsequently by many historians – as too eager to accommodate German ambitions internationally.

sitting as a Court of the First Instance, acquitted Dr Arons of the charge of imparting his views to his pupils, and declared him to be eminently worthy of his office. This decision had now been reversed by a Decree of the Prussian Government, signed by Prince Hohenlohe,⁸ by which Dr Arons is sentenced to dismissal from his post, to which moreover no state emolument is attached, and which, being of a scientific character, affords no scope for political agitation. It is stated in the decision of the Prussian Government that Dr Arons' conduct in the discharge of his duties was above reproach, and that in his political activity he never exceeded the "bounds of tact and decency". Nevertheless, the mere fact of membership of the Socialist Party is sufficient to justify the infliction of the heaviest disciplinary penalty. ["]The Socialist party aim at the overthrow of the existing order of state and society, with the aid of the labouring classes when these shall have attained to political power. The conscious advocacy of such aims is incompatible with the tenure of the office of teacher at a Royal University".

The incident gains in importance from the fact that at the present time there exists no special legislation against Socialism in Germany, and that therefore strictly speaking the Socialists have a claim to be treated on an equal footing with the other political parties, so long as they do not make use of unlawful means for the attainment of their ends. It may also be doubted wh[e]ther the Government are well-advised in thus refusing to assimilate the Socialist element by retaining Socialists in offices which have no bearing on political controversy.

The well-known Liberal writer, Dr Theodor Barth, draws attention to the anomaly that, while the French Minister of Commerce⁹ is himself a Socialist, and in constant and friendly communication with Prince Hohenlohe, the Head of the German Government, on the subject of the Paris Exhibition, that same Prince Hohenlohe should put his name to a historic document, which in the threshold of a new century, proclaims to the world how far Prussia has progressed in the direction of political toleration. And he suggests that the Decree of Condemnation against Dr Arons should be inscribed on that most durable of parchments, an ass' hide, and sent to Paris with the other German exhibits.

Source: The National Archives, FO 64/1492.¹⁰

8 Chancellor Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (served 1894–1900).

9 Alexandre Millerand (1859–1943), served as French minister of commerce (1899–1902) in the Cabinet of René Waldeck-Rousseau. His appointment sparked debates in France, Germany, and the Second International about the participation of socialists in bourgeois governments.

10 Transcript provided to the author by Markus Mößlang.

Sir Condie Stephen to Marquess of Salisbury, No. 43, Dresden
(October 14, 1900)

The Kingdom of Saxony was far from the only federal state in which Social Democrats were registering election victories around the turn of the new century. Here Stephen reports on elections to the separate Landtage in the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (in Thuringia), to which he was also accredited. He sees a remarkable increase of the socialist vote.

As considerable attention has lately been devoted in political circles in Germany to the elections in the Duchy of Gotha, it may perhaps interest Your Lordship to receive a few particulars. Socialism has for some little time past been making rapid headway in this Duchy; in the last Diet no fewer than six and at one time even seven out of the nineteen members of the Chamber belonged to the so-called revolutionary party, which has received a still further accession of strength in the present elections.

Before attempting to account for the causes of this state of things, it may be well to briefly explain that each of the Duchies of Coburg and Gotha has its own chamber. These chambers are independent of each other, but they meet occasionally in joint session for legislation on affairs common to the two Duchies. The Gotha Chamber, as has been said above, consists of nineteen members who are returned by an indirect vote. Every man over 25 years of age, who is a subject of the Duke and who pays direct taxes, has a vote in one of the electoral divisions. Servants and individuals in analogous positions who have not an independent household of their own are excluded from the franchise. In each electoral division a certain number of direct electors (*Wahlmänner*) are returned by the general body of voters, and these direct electors finally return the member for the division.

At present only the preliminary stage of the elections has been concluded; the direct electors have been returned, but they have not yet elected the actual members of the Chamber. There can, however, be no doubt that in the final result the Socialist party will dispose of nine seats, and it is thought not altogether impossible that they may secure a tenth, which would give them an absolute majority. Of course even with only nine seats they will be the most powerful party in the Chamber, as the other members, far from being united, will be split up into rival factions of liberals on the one side and agrarians and anti-semites on the other.

It is curious to notice that, whereas in the Duchy of Coburg no socialist has ever yet been elected into the Chamber, Gotha with a precisely similar electoral law and distribution of the franchise, has in each successive Diet had an increased number of Socialist representatives, and has now

almost, if not quite[,] given that party an absolute majority. This fact is probably to some extent due to the circumstance that a large portion of the Duchy of Gotha is composed of forests, whose inhabitants are very poor and have lately been much under the influence of professional agitators who have made capital for the Socialist party out of the discontent arising from the damage done to the woods by the game. The vexed and complicated question of the Domains has also alienated a certain amount of support from the Government, and owing to their superior organization the Socialists rather than the liberals have profited by this dissatisfaction in the country districts, while in the towns the workers in factories (of whom there are many) are under any circumstances, as almost everywhere else in Germany, consistent supporters of the extreme party.

At the same time it can hardly be denied that, although the Government have in point of fact shown themselves willing to arrange a compromise with regard to the grievances referred to, the manner of Herr von Strengé,¹¹ the Minister of State, in dealing with his political opponents has not been very fortunate, and the result is that His Excellency has received little or no credit for his good intentions, and has usually found a solid phalanx of Socialists and radicals arrayed against him in the Chamber, while his actions and utterances have seldom found favour with the Press. Under these circumstances it is not unnatural that some papers should now be discussing whether after the present Elections his position will not have become untenable. On the other hand it is well to bear in mind that there is remarkable scarcity of political talent in the Duchies, and that it might be difficult to find a successor who with equal administrative ability and force of character would be more successful in conciliating and disarming parliamentary opposition. Moreover it must be remarked that in reality the proceedings in the Gotha Chamber are not of very much consequence, as all business of importance is transacted by the Chambers of both Duchies assembled in joint session, and in any case no law which might be passed would be valid until it had received the assent of the Sovereign.

Now as the Coburg Chamber consists of eleven members, (none of whom will in all probability be Socialist), the nine or ten Socialists from Gotha would be in a small minority in the United Chamber of thirty members, whereas in the Gotha Chamber, even with an absolute majority, they would only have rather more power than previously to make themselves obnoxious to the Government without being able to do any very serious harm. The local Press at any rate does not seem to anticipate

11 Karl Friedrich von Strengé (1843–1907), named by Duke Ernst II as *de facto* leader of the state ministry of the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha from 1891 to 1900.

the introduction of any far-reaching change and appears to be principally interested in the question whether the Socialists will propose their leader, Herr Bock,¹² for election as President of the new Chamber, or whether they will prefer to retain his services as their most effective speaker in debate. Nor should it be forgotten that in all probability many of the electors voted for Socialist candidates as a protest against real or imaginary grievances rather than in token of their adherence to collectivist or revolutionary doctrines, and that they had less reluctance in doing so because they knew very well how little power the chamber has to translate violent talk into subversive action.

Source: The National Archives, FO 30/301.

Sir Condie Stephen to Marquess of Lansdowne, Confidential, No. 2, Dresden (January 8, 1901)

The Social Democratic press in Saxony seems infected with the Anglophobia fanned by the Pan-German League and other radical nationalist groups during the Boer War. A comment on Stephen's report reads, "Sir C. Stephen's explanation of the reasons of the Anglophobia read plausible."

Mr. Kruger's¹³ arrival in Europe coupled with the news of the Boer invasion into Cape Colony has caused a recrudescence of some more or less acute symptoms of Anglophobia in Saxony.... [N]either the Press nor the public seem to attach any importance to the accuracy of their information...; they wish to believe that the British Army is composed of dissolute and undisciplined hordes of mercenary ruffians, and they accordingly gloat over any blood-curdling story in which ravished women and murdered infants play the principal part....

A variety of causes have, I think, contributed to produce this extraordinary state of public opinion. In the first place, it may be pointed out that Saxony is the home of the Pan-Germanic League, that it is moreover a great stronghold of a very virulent type of Anti-Semitism, and that its most widely read newspapers are what is nowadays called "Bismarckian"

12 Wilhelm Bock (1846–1931), leading Social Democrat functionary in Thuringia from the 1870s onward and head of various shoemakers' organizations. He sat for Saxe-Coburg-Gotha in the Reichstag from 1884 to 1918 (with interruptions) and in the *Landtag* of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha from 1893 to 1918. He served as vice-president of that *Landtag* in 1903–7.

13 Paul Kruger (1825–1904), president of the South African Republic 1883–1900, became the prominent leader of resistance to Britain, which culminated in the Second Boer War of 1899–1902.

in tendency. These parties unite with the Agrarians in denouncing England in and out of season....

Again, there are many politicians and journalists who are dissatisfied with the internal policy of the present régime, and they have not unnaturally made the most of the opportunity afforded by the pro-Boer sympathies of the nation, and have endeavoured to unite the usually divergent factions in a combined attack on the Government whose neutrality they describe as unduly favourable to England. Some such considerations have probably influenced the attitude of the Socialist Press, which is usually rather friendly to England, but which during the progress of the war has become more and more violently pro-Boer and anti-British, and has later reached the high-water-mark of abusiveness while making party-capital out of the Emperor's refusal to receive Mr. Kruger.

Nevertheless, it would, in my opinion, be a mistake to regard the popular excitement as entirely or even principally emanating from hostility to the Government or political intrigue. The flame has, no doubt, been fanned by professional agitators, and the Press has eagerly fed it with the fuel of misrepresentation, but it has undeniably in some degree its origin in a generous sympathy with what is believed to be a small and kindred people fighting for its freedom against a mighty Empire. It is questionable whether the Germans are any longer a nation of deep thinkers, but they are still inclined to be idealists, though their enthusiasm is apt to seek its outlet in noise rather than in deeds....

[L]ast Sunday a pro-Boer public meeting was held here under the auspices of the anti-Semitic "German Social Reform Party".... According to newspaper accounts, there was a large attendance and the speeches seem to have been of the usual provocative type. All the old stories about Dum-Dum bullets and British atrocities generally were expatiated on.... After this there was much denunciation of the pusillanimous attitude of the [Reich] Government and the Reichstag, and the hope was expressed that German policy would soon return to "Bismarckian" and "truly national" lines.... It may perhaps be said that the Federal Governments might have done more than has actually been done to influence the Press and check the agitation, but as explanation of their apparent indifference I would venture to suggest that, in view of the very complicated and difficult political situation at home, the authorities may possibly not have been unwilling to concentrate public attention on foreign affairs, and thus keep off those "internal crises" which [Chancellor] Count [Bernhard von] Bülow is reported to be so anxious to avoid.

Source: The National Archives, FO 30/305.¹⁴

14 Transcript provided to the author by Markus Mößlang.

**Lord Hugh Gough to Marquess of Lansdowne, No. 122, Berlin
(May 11, 1901)**

The Reichstag is debating the amendment to German electoral law that would provide per diem payments to deputies. If such a measure had been introduced in the 1870s, it would have lightened the burden on Social Democratic members of the Reichstag who, like August Bebel, often struggled to balance their parliamentary duties with gainful employment.¹⁵ By 1901, however, the Social Democrats had largely overcome this impediment, having found ways – not very clandestine – to funnel money to their representatives in Berlin. Lord Gough – secretary of embassy at Berlin – reports on the speech in favour of this amendment by the co-chair of the Social Democratic Party, Paul Singer.

In accordance with Article 32 of the Constitution of the German Empire, members of the Reichstag travel free of expense from their homes to Berlin and back. This right begins eight days before the opening of the session and expires eight days after its close.

The day before yesterday the Reichstag was engaged on the second reading of a Bill to amend the above mentioned Article.¹⁶ It was proposed that members of the Reichstag While [*sic*] preserving their privilege of travelling free of charge as before, should receive twenty Marks per diem (about £1) during their residence in Berlin. Absence from the capital on business connected with the Reichstag would be counted as residence as far as pay was concerned.

A long debate ensued on this amendment, the chief opposition to it coming from the Conservatives, who asserted among other things that its adoption would lower the level of the House. The Socialist member, Singer, was naturally warmly in favour of the proposal. He made a most lively speech in the course of which he asked whether the level of such a caricature of a Representative House as the Prussian Diet [*Landtag*] was was [*sic*] not lower than that of a properly and popularly elected Assembly like the German Reichstag. For this remark he was called to order. He concluded by advocating the immediate adoption of the Amendment in order to show that the House consisted of – to use a new word – “fellows” (“Kerls”) who would not be intimidated. Herr Singer was

15 During the 1880s, Bebel relied heavily on the per diem payments he received as a member of the Saxon *Landtag*.

16 See Hermann Butzer, *Diäten und Freifahrt im Deutschen Reichstag* (Düsseldorf, 1999). Legislation to compensate Reichstag deputies was delayed repeatedly and was finally passed in 1906.

alluding to a reported remark of the Emperor's which had found its way into the Press, viz: "What, the fellows want to be paid now!"

This brought the Secretary of State for the Interior¹⁷ to his feet. He said that he must make a last remark on the last statement of the previous speaker. It was greatly to be regretted that the custom was growing of bringing in the names of highly placed persons and of making statements connected with them which were based only on unworthy gossip. He took the opportunity of stating that the report which Herr Singer had referred to was a pure invention.

Source: The National Archives, FO 64/1521.¹⁸

George W. Buchanan¹⁹ to Marquess of Lansdowne, No. 254, Berlin (December 12, 1902)

One of the most important economic measures in Wilhelmine Germany was Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow's Tariff Bill, which finally passed the Reichstag after months of parliamentary rancour in December 1902. Tariffs on agricultural and other products significantly raised the price of bread and the cost of living for working-class Germans, and they provided an electoral rallying cry for Social Democrats for years to come. Buchanan reports how the debate prompted Kaiser Wilhelm II to reiterate his determination to crush Social Democracy – or at least to draw workers away from the party. That in turn provoked August Bebel to warn supporters of the new tariffs that they would pay the price in the Reichstag elections scheduled for June 1903.

Herr von Kardorff's²⁰ motion, modifying paragraph 1 of the Tariff Bill ... was yesterday carried by 184 to 136 votes, and the Bill itself was subsequently read a second time by a like majority.

17 Count Arthur von Posadowsky-Wehner (1845–1932), Reich state secretary of the interior and vice-chancellor, 1897–1907.

18 Transcript provided to the author by Markus Mößlang.

19 George W. Buchanan (1854–1924) entered Britain's diplomatic service in 1876. In late 1901, having recently served as chargé d'affaires at Darmstadt (Hessen) and Karlsruhe (Baden), he moved to Berlin, where he was appointed first secretary at the Berlin Embassy, replacing Lord Gough, who left for Dresden. Buchanan left that post in 1903 and eventually was appointed ambassador to Russia in 1910.

20 Wilhelm von Kardorff (1828–1907), prominent member of the Imperial and Free Conservative Party and determined advocate of protective tariffs.

This final result was, however, only obtained after a further change in the rules of procedure had been forced through the House for the purpose of preventing the minority raising prolonged discussions on points of order. Up till now a Member has always been heard at once in raising a point of order, but by the new rule power is conferred on the President to decide whether the Member shall be permitted to raise the point of order at all, while in the event of such permission being granted a time limit of five minutes is imposed on the Speaker.

...

In the struggle that for the past month has raged round the Tariff question in the Reichstag, much more has been at stake than the fate of the Bill itself. Apart from the direct interests which the Agrarian majority had in passing it, they were confronted with the vital question of crushing the opposition of the Social-Democrats and Radicals, so that these latter should not enjoy the triumph of proclaiming throughout the Empire that the Tariff Bill had received its death-blow at their hands. The parliamentary campaign which has now ended in the victory of the Agrarians is but the precursor of that which will shortly have to be fought out at the General Elections [of June 1903]. Then and then only will the final judgment be passed on the arbitrary proceedings by which the majority have suppressed all debate on a measure directly affecting the interests of the working classes. The importance attached to the coming struggle in high quarters may be judged by the fact that the Emperor [Wilhelm II] himself has already stepped into the electoral arena, and thrown down the gauntlet to the Social-Democratic party.

In a speech which he delivered last week to a Deputation of working men at Breslau, His Majesty remarked that the solicitude which he had always shown in their welfare, entitled him to say a few warning words. The working classes had for years past allowed themselves to be deluded by Socialist agitators into the belief that their only chance of bettering their position lay in joining the Social-Democratic party. That[,] His Majesty declared[,] was a downright lie and a serious error. The object of these agitators was to incite the working classes against the Throne, the Altar and their employers; to exploit them for their own purposes; to set class against class; to disseminate slander and, as in the case of the late Herr Krupp, to assail what Germans held most dear, the honour of their name. With such men it was impossible to have any dealings, and His Majesty therefore implored his hearers to send to the Reichstag simple, plain men from the workshop, – men animated by sentiments of loyalty to the King and of respect for the law and state, with whom the

representatives of the other classes would gladly co-operate in promoting the welfare of the people and the country.

The eloquence and earnestness of the Emperor's words have met, as is natural, with due recognition, but serious doubt[s] are expressed as to the wisdom of the Sovereign taking a direct part in an Anti-Socialist campaign. Social-democracy has long been an important factor in the political life of Germany, and an appeal, however eloquent, on the part of the Emperor, is not likely to cause any of its followers to desert its standard. The moment also is not well chosen for the success of such an appeal. At a time of general commercial and industrial depression the ranks of the Social-democrats are more likely to be swelled by new recruits than thinned by deserters, while the suppression of all debate in the Reichstag on a measure which must raise the cost of the first necessities of life is an electoral cry of which their leaders will make good use.

The spirit in which they intend to fight the Elections may be gathered from the concluding words of Herr Bebel's final protest in the Reichstag: "You will" he said, turning to the Agrarians, "take home this Bill as a Christmas gift to those belonging to your class, while outside that class, millions are starving and unable to procure the necessities of life. We however will tell the people of your treason, and unless we are much mistaken, the popular verdict pronounced against you will sweep you utterly away."

Source: The National Archives, FO 64/1552.²¹

George W. Buchanan to Marquess of Lansdowne, No. 147, Berlin (June 24, 1903)

The secretary of embassy in Berlin reports on the outcome of the Reichstag elections held in mid-June 1903 and the "triumph of the Social Democrats" (see table 12 for results in Saxony and the Reich). His final line suggests agreement with August Bebel's boast that every speech the Kaiser delivered against the Social Democrats was worth 100,000 votes the next time Germans went to the polls.

The moral which the advocates of unrestricted Free Trade in England have attempted to draw from the result of the German Elections, is

21 Transcript provided to the author by Markus Mößlang.

founded on a somewhat narrow conception of the causes of the triumph of the Social Democrats.

Though the final returns are not yet published, the number of votes polled by that party is certainly over three millions, or nearly a million more than in 1898. The cry of dear bread [i.e., expensive bread] no doubt contributed to this result. Pamphlets dealing with the subject were distributed broad cast [*sic*] throughout the Constituencies, and the Electorate was informed that the German Housewife at present pays what is equivalent to a tax of 23 percent on the value of the bread she buys, and that, under the new Tariff, she will have to pay as much as 34 percent. Similar statistics were also given as regards the probable rise in the cost of other necessities of life.

It is not, however, by this cry alone that the Socialist victory has been won, nor can the result of the Elections be regarded solely in the light of a protest against protection. The doctrinaire Free Traders of the two [left-liberal] Radical Groups did not win a single seat at the first Ballots, while the Conservatives and the [Catholic] Centre, who form the bulk of the Protectionist majority, have sustained but few losses. The extreme Agrarians have, it is true, suffered severely, but their defeat was a welcome relief to the Government responsible for the minimum duties of the new Tariff. In addition to a protest against dear food, the Socialist programme comprises demands for Ministerial responsibility, payment of members,²² redistribution of seats[,] freedom of speech and of the press, and for sweeping reforms in the army, the Church and the general administration of the State. The indignation aroused at the methods by which the new Tariff was rushed through the Reichstag in a single sitting, the dissatisfaction felt by business men at the laws governing the Bourse [stock exchange], the discontent always engendered at times of economic depression, the complaints so often raised of late respecting the administration of justice and reactionary character of some of the measures submitted to the late Reichstag, have all added their quota of recruits to the Socialist ranks. The Emperor's ill-advised electoral campaign of last winter has also had an effect diametrically opposed to that intended by His Majesty, and the result of the Elections seems almost to justify the boast once made by Herr Bebel that each Speech made by the Emperor against the Socialist party was worth a hundred thousand votes to them at the General Elections.

Source: The National Archives, FO 64/1573.²³

22 Per diem payments to sitting members of the Reichstag, finally approved in 1906.

23 Transcript provided to the author by Markus Mößlang.

Lord Hugh Gough²⁴ to Marquess of Lansdowne,²⁵ No. 36, Dresden
(July 4, 1903)

Like his predecessor Sir Condie Stephen, Lord Gough's reports to London after his appointment as British envoy to the Saxon court in October 1901 were infrequent; they were also brief, sometimes erroneous, and rarely devoted to Saxon domestic politics or elections. Gough found the results of the Reichstag elections of June 1903 in Saxony to be "strange." With unhelpful British understatement he notes "a prevalent vague feeling of dissatisfaction" about the Saxon Landtag suffrage enacted in 1896.²⁶ Otherwise, Gough seems unaware of the tremendous effort put forth by Social Democrats, not only on election day (June 16, 1903) but also in the run-off polls, when voter turnout jumped from 83.0 per cent to 86.5 per cent. Instead he sends to London an election map – albeit a richly detailed one – that had been produced in little more than one month after the polls closed, showing the winning party in every one of Germany's 397 Reichstag districts.²⁷

Eighty per cent of Dresden voters voted, and here as elsewhere in the Kingdom, not the least excitement was shown, nor could a visitor perceive that anything unusual was going on.

Source: The National Archives, FO 30/313.

24 Hugh Gough (1849–1919), 3rd Viscount Gough (as of 1895), was a career diplomat whose first posting was to the British legation at Rio de Janeiro in 1873 and whose subsequent appointments included Madrid, Athens, The Hague, Rome, St. Petersburg, Stockholm, and Washington DC. Succeeding Sir Condie Stephen in Dresden, he became minister resident to the courts of the Kingdom of Saxony and the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in October 1901 (he was also appointed chargé d'affaires to the Principality of Waldeck and Pyrmont). He retired on a pension in May 1907.

25 Henry Charles Keith Petty-Fitzmaurice, 5th Marquess of Lansdowne (1845–1927). He was a British statesman who served successively as the fifth governor general of Canada, viceroy of India, secretary of state for war, and secretary of state for foreign affairs (1900–5).

26 See George Strachey's reports from late 1895 and early 1896.

27 *Reichstags-Wahlkarte des Deutschen Reiches. Nach den Ergebniß der Wahlen vom 16. Juni 1903* (Vienna, 1903): reproduced as [map S.8.3](#) in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*.

Table 12. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1898 and 1903

	June 16, 1898			June 16, 1903		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
Saxony						
Conservatives	109,437	18.1	5	85,321	11.4	0
National Liberals	89,060	14.7	4	97,869	13.0	0
Left Liberals	31,160	5.2	0	46,769	6.2	0
Antisemites	73,427	12.1	3	73,656	9.8	1
Social Democrats	299,190	49.5	11	441,764	58.8	22
Total votes cast / seats	607,444		23	754,894		23
Voter turnout rate (%)	73.9			83.0		
Reich						
German Conservatives	859,222	11.0	56	948,448	10.0	54
Free Conservatives	343,642	4.4	23	333,404	3.5	21
National Liberals	971,302	12.5	46	1,317,401	13.9	51
Left Liberals	862,524	11.1	49	872,653	9.2	36
Antisemites	284,250	3.7	13	244,543	2.6	11
Agrarians / Peasant parties	250,693	3.2	11	230,134	2.4	8
Social Democrats	2,107,076	27.2	56	3,010,771	31.7	81
Total votes cast / seats	7,786,714		397	9,533,826		397
Voter turnout rate (%)	68.1			76.1		

Source: Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 330 (and for explanatory notes).

Note: Some parties have been omitted for the sake of clarity.

Lord Hugh Gough to Marquess of Lansdowne, No. 39, Dresden (July 8, 1903)

In this report Gough comments on one of the most important consequences of the Social Democrats' stunning victory in the Reichstag elections of June 1903 (when the SPD won twenty-two of twenty-three Saxon seats). With his speech at Pirna in early July 1903, Saxony's government leader Metzsch signals that his government will initiate plans to revise the much-hated three-class suffrage for the Saxon Landtag. Its patently discriminatory suffrage contrasted so sharply with the Reichstag's universal manhood suffrage that, after the SPD's "frightful" Reichstag

victory in June 1903, Metzsch realized that he had to address the “great bucket of discontent” among working-class Saxons. His Pirna announcement set off a suffrage reform debate in Saxony that lasted six years and ended with implementation of a new plural suffrage in 1909.

With reference to my despatch No. 36 of the 4th instant, reporting the result of the Reichstag elections in Saxony, I have the honour to state that, in a speech made last week at Pirna by the Prime Minister,²⁸ who is Lord Goschen’s [former] brother-in-law, His Excellency described the result of the elections as frightful. A part of the population, led astray by agitators, had voted in a manner which seemed to threaten all Public Institutions.

One must not however lose courage [Metzsch continued], but take appropriate action in the future.

A chronic state of dissatisfaction prevailed, which led many to vote against the Government. It would be the conscientious duty of all municipal authorities to help to better this state of things. Especially in economic questions all Public Authorities should work together for an improvement. The Government did not pretend to infallibility, and would correct any mistakes which they might have made in the past. They hoped that the great bucket of discontent would be, if not altogether emptied, at least partially so.

Dr. Müller,²⁹ Representative of Meiningen, a leading advanced Liberal, has issued a long account of – or apology for, – the defeat of his party in Saxony, and in other German States. His party was, it seems, exposed to a crossfire from unscrupulous adversaries on the right and left, and had to shew front in three or four directions.

The Socialists, who had acted as faithful allies of the [Catholic] Ultramontanes in Bavaria, cleverly succeeded in representing themselves in Saxony as guardians of enlightenment and freedom.

Source: The National Archives, FO 30/313.

28 Georg von Metzsch.

29 Ernst Müller-Meiningen (1866–1944), a Bavarian lawyer, represented a Thuringian Reichstag constituency from 1898 to 1918. As a member of the Radical People’s Party (*Freisinnige Volkspartei*) he was a close associate of Eugen Richter and an ardent nationalist.



Figure 24. “The Ruthless August.” This drawing by Gustav Brandt (1861–1919) appeared in 1903, the year Bebel dealt savagely with his revisionist opponents at the SPD party congress held in Dresden. (In preparation for that showdown, Bebel wrote to Karl Kautsky: “I don’t only bark, I bite.”)*

Source: “Der rabiate August,” *Kladderadatsch. Humoristisch-satirisches Wochenblatt* (Berlin), Jg. 56, 1903 / bpk Bildagentur / Art Resource, NY.

* Cited in Ilse Fischer and Werner Krause, eds., *August Bebel 1840–1913* (Cologne, 1988), 158.

Sir Frank C. Lascelles to Marquess of Lansdowne, No. 195, Berlin
(September 23, 1903)

*The annual SPD congress was held in Dresden in September 1903. Convening in the capital of the Kingdom of Saxony, it provided an opportunity to celebrate the astounding victory of Social Democratic candidates in twenty-two of twenty-three Saxon Reichstag constituencies in the general election of June 1903. But as Britain's ambassador in Berlin explains, this was also the occasion of August Bebel's fiercest attack on revisionists in the party.*³⁰

The Social Democratic Congress which has sat for over a week at Dresden, is generally considered to have done little to further the interests of the party which polled nearly three million votes at the late elections and is now the second largest in the Reichstag.

With the elections to the Prussian Landtag in the near future it might have been expected that some distinct programme of political action would have been adopted or discussed, but the practical reforms such as the eight hours day or the regulation of female labour, which appeared on the Agenda of the Congress, were hardly mentioned in the debates. The delegates spent the first three days in deciding that Socialists ought not to write for bourgeois journals, and the next three days were occupied with the attitude of the party to the question whether it would be possible for a Social Democrat to become one of the Vice-Presidents of the Reichstag. What would be the tactics of the party leaders on this point has been a matter of speculation in the press ever since their success at the last elections seemed to give them a claim to this post. At the congress the discussion led to a long-winded conflict between Herr [August] Bebel, the recognized head of the party and the champion of orthodox Social Democracy, and the so-called "Revisionists" under Herr [Georg] von Vollmar. Herr Bebel denounced the spirit of compromise with the existing order of things which finds favour with the Revisionists, and the latter in a number of long speeches attempted to uphold their claim to private judgment. A resolution brought in by the Orthodox leaders was finally passed by two hundred and eighty eight votes to eleven. The following is a translation of the main part of this Resolution which brings out clearly the divergent tendencies existing within the Social Democratic party.

The Congress demands that the party should make good its "claim to fill the place of First President of the Reichstag by a candidate drawn from its ranks but that it should refuse to undertake any duties at Court

30 See the discussion of Eduard Bernstein and SPD revisionism in the Introduction.

or to lay itself under any obligations without foundation in the Imperial Constitution.

The Congress most emphatically condemns the ‘revisionist’ efforts to alter our tactics, which are based on the conflict between the classes, and have hitherto been crowned with success, in such a manner that instead of winning political power by overcoming our opponents, we should commonly employ the tactics of compromise. The consequence of revisionist tactics of this kind would be that, from being a party which labours for the speediest possible transformation of the existing bourgeois order of society into a Socialistic order of society, and is therefore in the best sense of the word revolutionary, we should become a party satisfied with reforming bourgeois society. The congress, therefore, in contrast to the revisionist tendenc[i]es within the party, is convinced that class antagonisms are not growing weaker but are steadily becoming more acute, and declares – (1) That the party disclaims responsibility for political and economic conditions based on capitalist methods of production, and that it therefore refuses to give its assent to any of the methods calculated to retain the ruling class at the head of the Government; (2) that the Social Democracy in conformity with the Kautsky resolution passed at the International Congress of 1900, cannot endeavour to obtain a share of the governmental powers under bourgeois conditions of society. The congress condemns every attempt to slur over the existing and continually increasing antagonisms in order to make it easy to fall back upon the support of the bourgeois parties”. A final paragraph of the Resolution declares the determination of the party to uphold its traditional attitude – the support of the interests of the working classes and opposition to militarism, naval expansion, and colonial and Imperial policy in the wider sense.

The net result of the Congress thus appears to have been the complete defeat of the Revisionists, but it is evident from the criticisms of the Social Democratic press itself that the party is not entirely at one with its leaders, and this dissatisfaction found expression in the Debates at Dresden if not in the resolution which closed the proceedings. The divergence of opinion however has not gone far enough to justify the hopes put forward lately in some Radical Journals that new developments among the Social democrats might eventually lead to some combination of the left against the Clericals and Agrarians.

Source: The National Archives, FO 64/1574.³¹

31 Transcript provided to the author by Markus Mößlang.

George W. Buchanan to the Marquess of Lansdowne, No. 237, Berlin
(November 22, 1903)

The secretary of embassy in Berlin reports on the outcome of elections to the Prussian Landtag, which Social Democrats contested seriously for the first time. As he notes, Prussia's notorious three-class suffrage, including the system of indirect voting (first for delegates, then for parliamentary deputies), prevented the election of a single SPD candidate.

The elections for the Second Chamber of the Prussian Diet, which commenced ten days ago, were concluded yesterday with the following results:

Conservatives	148 + 4
Free Conservatives	54 – 4
Centre	97 – 3
National Liberals	79 + 5
Radicals	31 – 6
Poles	13
Danes	2
Extreme Agrarians	2
Various	7 + 4
Total	443

The composition of the Chamber thus remains virtually the same, and the Conservative Clerical majority,³² which has hitherto successfully resisted the passing of the Rhine-Elbe Canal Bill,³³ has been returned with the insignificant loss of three seats.

The chief feature of interest in the elections has been derived from the fact that the Social Democratic party have now, for the first time, taken an active part in them.

They have hitherto been debarred from putting forward candidates of their own by the hopelessness of attempting to win seats under the system of indirect suffrage which still obtains in Prussia.

According to this system³⁴ each of the electoral districts, of which the various constituencies are composed, is divided into three classes of electors, according to the amount which each elector contributes to the State

32 Comprising the German Conservative Party, the Imperial and Free Conservative Party, and the (Catholic) Centre Party.

33 The *Mittelland* Canal bill.

34 See Thomas Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht und Wahlkultur in Preussen 1867–1914* (Düsseldorf, 1994).

in direct taxes. The combined votes of each of the three classes have an equal value in returning the Members of the Electoral College by whom the Deputies are finally chosen, although the first class, as is the case in one of the electoral districts in Berlin, may consist of only one wealthy tax-payer.

Emboldened by their success at the recent elections for the Reichstag, the Social Democrats determined this year to try their fortune at the elections for the Prussian Diet either by presenting candidates of their own in certain constituencies, or, when this was manifestly a forlorn hope, by throwing the weight of their influence into the scale in favour of the candidates of the two [left-liberal] Radical parties. Their efforts, however, have ended in complete failure, and the second strongest party in the Reichstag has not succeeded in returning a single Social Democrat to the Second Chamber of the Prussian Diet.

On the contrary, by contesting seats which might with their support have been won by Radical candidates, they have in a few constituencies facilitated the return of candidates representing the parties of reaction.

On the other hand, the National Liberals – the representatives of the great industrialists, who favour the project of a Rhine-Elbe Canal – have, by allying themselves with the Radicals in certain doubtful constituencies, succeeded in gaining five seats.

Source: The National Archives, FO 64/[1574].³⁵



Figure 25. August Bebel addressing the Reichstag from the speaker's rostrum on December 7, 1905. Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow can be seen sitting at extreme left.

Source: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung / Public domain.

³⁵ Transcript provided to the author by Markus Mößlang.

George W. Buchanan to Marquess of Lansdowne, No. 252, Berlin
(December 12, 1903)

British appraisals of German Social Democracy often documented speakers' duels between SPD deputies and state ministers in the German Reichstag. Between 1900 and 1909 the most spectacular clashes tended to erupt between August Bebel and Chancellor Bülow. Buchanan was first secretary of the British embassy in Berlin, and this report is preceded by summary lines that reveal his political sympathies: he cites the "angry speech" by Bebel and the "brilliant counter attack on the social democratic party" by Bülow.

The debate on the Estimates for the financial year 1904 and on the Finance Reform Bill ... was opened last Wednesday in the Reichstag....

...

The next speaker, Herr Bebel, made a violent attack on the policy of the Imperial Government both at home and abroad. He ascribed the present unsatisfactory state of the finances to the military, naval and colonial programmes, and maintained that the new Bill would deprive the Reichstag of all control over the public purse. After exposing to a scathing criticism the abuses which he alleged to exist in various branches of the administration, he passed in review the principal achievements of the Government in the field of Foreign Policy – the Venezuelan incident, the presents sent to America, the brilliant reception accorded to Mr Vanderbilt and subservience of the basest description towards Russia. Herr Bebel concluded with a violent denunciation of the internal administration of the Russian Empire.

The Imperial Chancellor [Bülow] then rose to reply in what is said to have been the most successful Speech which he has yet delivered in the Reichstag. After answering the various charges brought by Herr Bebel against the military administration, Count Bülow turned to those levied against the Foreign Policy of the Government. They had been accused, he said, of a pushing adventurous policy in East Asia and of inaction in Manchuria. If there was one place in the world where Germany had nothing to gain, it was Manchuria, and he would not therefore, follow Herr Bebel in a crusade on behalf of the natives of that Province. The policy of the Imperial Government in East Asia, as indeed all over the world, was sober, peaceful and loyal, and, humanly speaking, there was not the slightest probability of complications arising there between Russia and Germany, as Herr Bebel had predicted.

...

The rest of Count Bülow's speech consisted in a brilliant counter attack on the social democratic party. He had been asked, he said, why he would

not play the part of a “Millerand”,³⁶ and could only reply that Millerand was a true patriot, which was more than he could say of the Social democratic party. Nothing, he continued, had so prejudiced the cause of the working classes as the republican and antimonarchical tendencies of that party. No universal “serum” had as yet been discovered wherewith to heal all the ills of the body politic, but in no Republic in the world had so much been done for the working man as in the German Empire. The gospel of liberty preached by the Social Democratic Party was, Count Bülow remarked, of a very one sided character, for no party respected less than they did the liberty of others or were so intolerant towards those who were of a different opinion to themselves. The proceedings at their recent party conference at Dresden clearly showed that liberty to them meant the power to dictate to and to tyrannize over others.

Count Bülow concluded by referring to the Socialistic dreams of an ideal State [*Zukunftsstaat*], and remarked that no greater misfortune could befall Herr Bebel than to be given the power to carry out his idea of a model Republic.

Source: The National Archives, FO 64/1574.³⁷

Lord Hugh Gough to Marquess of Lansdowne, No. 31, Dresden (December 4, 1905)

In November and December 1905, Social Democrats organized massive rallies in Dresden, Leipzig, and other Saxon cities, protesting the three-class Landtag suffrage of 1896 and denouncing the government for delaying reform. The demonstrations grew violent on December 3, when between one-sixth and one-quarter of Dresden's adult male population took to the streets. A running battle between protesters and police lasted for three hours. As diplomatic envoys from other countries reported, and as police files documented, a few gendarmes were beaten to the ground with fists and canes, whereas dozens of demonstrators received blows to their arms, backs, and heads from police truncheons, riding whips, and sabres. One demonstrator lost half an ear. Little of this violence registered with Gough, who does not even report correctly the number of Saxon seats in the Reichstag.

36 Referring to the French socialist Alexandre Millerand (see earlier note). In 1899 he joined René Waldeck-Rousseau's cabinet of “republican defence” as minister of commerce and applied himself to bettering labour conditions, to upgrading the mercantile marine, and to developing trade, educational resources, and the postal system.

37 Transcript provided to the author by Markus Mößlang.

I have the honour to inform Your Lordship that political meetings took place yesterday in 7 halls in this Capital followed by street processions, the latter notwithstanding police prohibition.

The meetings were got up by the Social Democratic party and addressed by Socialist Members of the Reichstag in favour of an alteration of the suffrage for the Saxon Parliament [*Landtag*].

Whilst Saxony is represented in the Reichstag by 23 [*sic* for 22] Social Democrats out of 24 [*sic* for 23] Members, (though one of the 23, the Member for Chemnitz is resigning his seat) the Landtag contains only one Socialist Member. This divergence is attributed to the system of indirect suffrage by classes which prevails in Saxony as also in neighbouring States in elections to the local Parliaments, but not to the Reichstag. The street demonstrations of yesterday in Dresden and elsewhere in this Kingdom were designed to exercise pressure on the Government and the Landtag now sitting in order that a Bill should be introduced and passed to substitute a different suffrage system for the present one.

I am glad to inform Your Lordship that yesterday, though the Police had to draw their swords and give and receive many blows in the course of controlling the street processions, no serious injury seems to have been suffered by any person on either side.

Source: The National Archives, FO 30/323.

After 1905, leading figures in London's Foreign Office, including Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey and the expert for Germany, Eyre Crowe, often expressed dismissive opinions about the value of political reports they received from Dresden.³⁸ More insightful reports were sent by Sir Frank Lascelles in Berlin and Sir Fairfax L. Cartwright in Munich, among others. British envoys in Dresden, when they were not reporting on Germany as a commercial and naval rival, focused – however sporadically – on the increasingly tense debate about Landtag suffrage reform.

Since Saxon government leader Metzsch had indicated in July 1903 that some reform was contemplated, Social Democrats pushed for the maximum possible democratization of the Landtag suffrage. They demanded introduction of the Reichstag suffrage, with its general, direct, equal, and secret ballot for adult males. The Saxon “parties of order”

38 For example, Crowe's minute attached to Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay to Sir Edward Grey, No. 19, Dresden (May 13, 1908): “I have no doubt that the facts to which Mr. Findlay calls attention are known to the Local Govt Board.” The National Archives, FO 371/460; BFO-CP, reel 20, no. 17403.

refused to consider such a demand, for the same reasons they introduced three-class voting in 1896 – to prevent a Social Democratic majority in the Landtag. Gradually the non-socialist parties recognized that a plural suffrage stood the best chance of finding a majority of Conservative, National Liberal, and Progressive deputies willing to support such a compromise. In the meantime, the Reichstag elections of January–February 1907 had delivered a setback to Social Democrats and emboldened their enemies to resist any real democratization in Saxony.

Reports from other German capitals did a better job of painting the big picture of German domestic politics for London's Foreign Office. Those reports correctly identified reform of Prussia's own (and no less hated) three-class suffrage as the essential ingredient of any genuine reform of Germany's political system. British envoys in Dresden nonetheless noted that the fate of suffrage reform in Saxony had ramifications extending far beyond the kingdom's borders.

Lord Hugh Gough to Sir Edward Grey³⁹, Dresden (January 23, 1906)

December 1905 had produced violence between street demonstrators and police. The SPD had organized rallies on December 3 and December 16 that spilled the blood of workers and fuelled fear of revolution among police and the Saxon bourgeoisie. As Lord Gough reports now, things remain tense in January 1906, but both sides have drawn back from the brink.

In my despatch No. 31 of the 4th ultimo, I reported that some illegal street demonstrations had taken place in this Capital on the previous day. From that time until yesterday constant apprehensions have been felt of a renewal of such demonstrations, especially on Sundays, and on Saturday the 16th December such did actually occur.

The following is a brief account of the events in this connection.

On the 3rd of December simultaneously with the political meetings in Dresden, similar meetings, calling for an alteration of the suffrage, took place at Chemnitz, Zwickau and Plauen, three of the largest cities in Saxony, and also at Leipzig a few days earlier. It was only at Dresden and Chemnitz that any sort of conflict with the police took place.

³⁹ Sir Edward Grey (1862–1933), 1st Viscount Grey of Fallodon, was a British Liberal statesman and secretary of state for foreign affairs from December 1905 to December 1916, the longest continuous tenure of any holder in that office.

It was fully intended to demonstrate at Dresden on the Sundays following Sunday the 3rd up to Christmas, but the Chief Burgomaster⁴⁰ is believed to have persuaded the leaders not to disturb trade at Dresden on those particular Sundays when the shops are allowed to be open and booths in all open spaces, and an immense business is done in toys and Christmas presents.

On Saturday the 16th December, 7 meetings took place in halls at 9 in the evening, and from two of these meetings processions started to demonstrate in the streets.

After some time, at a late hour of night, several thousand persons were near the private residence of the Prime Minister,⁴¹ and advanced upon it at a run. They were with great difficulty stopped by the police and finally dispersed about 3 a.m. The police had to draw their swords, though not to use their firearms; from the crowd, however, three shots were fired one of which wounded a policeman.

Some 6 or 8 of the crowd, including those who had revolvers and daggers, have since been tried and convicted; in one case four years' imprisonment being pronounced.

An indoor meeting planned for January 10th at Dresden was forbidden by the President of the Police.⁴²

Seven socialist meetings planned to take place at Leipzig on January 21st [1906]⁴³ were forbidden by the Police of that City.

Eleven similar meetings to take place at Dresden on Saturday evening the 20th and Sunday morning the 21st were forbidden by the President of Police. The ground given in this last case was that the meetings were in the opinion of the President of Police not so much intended to consider the suffrage question as to propagate revolutionary ideas and a change

40 Gustav Otto Beutler (1853–1926) was a leading member of the State Association of Saxon Conservatives: he belonged to the national party's Committee of Twelve. He served as Dresden's lord mayor from 1895 to 1915.

41 Georg von Metzsch.

42 Paul Koettig (1856–1833) was Dresden's *Polizei-Direktor* from 1904 to 1919. Koettig is known in part for having introduced "*Daktyloskopie*" (fingerprinting) into Dresden and then German police practice in 1903. For Koettig's report on the events of December 16, see Koettig to Saxon Ministry of the Interior, December 21 and 22, 1905, Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden, Ministerium des Innern, Nr. 11043; cf. *Dresdner Nachrichten*, December 18, 1905; Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 398–9.

43 This was the "Red Sunday," when German Social Democrats planned to commemorate the first anniversary of the Russian Revolution of 1905 and its "Bloody Sunday." Most assemblies planned for January 21, 1906, were banned by local and state police.

of existing order by force, and that especially by celebrating the Russian Revolution, they would disturb the public peace and public safety.⁴⁴

Notwithstanding the prohibition it was feared by the public that attempts would be made to celebrate the anniversary of the sad event at St. Petersburg of January 22. last year, and various precautions were taken the exact nature and extent of which has not been made public. Nothing, however, happened either at Dresden or at Leipzig, Chemnitz, Zwickau, Plauen, Glauchau, Bautzen or Zittau. At Chemnitz indoor meetings were permitted by the police, and that may have been the case in some of the other cities.⁴⁵

An interesting small episode of the street demonstrations of December 3. was that the King happened to go out driving with the young Princes to the mountains on the other side of the Elbe and passed through a part of the Demonstrators who received His Majesty with all due and friendly respect.

In Saxon Law there is a great difference between indoor meetings and out-of-door meetings or processions. No out-of-door processions can legally take place without previous permission, and street demonstrations are equally forbidden unless consent has been obtained.

There is also the following difference between Dresden and the other towns above-mentioned, viz: – that there is a special article §15 in the Law of Association of 1850, which forbids any outside meetings whatever at Dresden when the Landtag is sitting, which is now the case. Public Meetings in a building are by Saxon Law on a quite different footing, and neither Socialists nor others usually find any obstacle to their being held.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/76; *BFO-CP*, reel 6, no. 3131.

44 Reginald Tower, British envoy to Bavaria, to Sir Edward Grey, No. 10, Munich (January 14, 1906), reported on the progress of the Bavarian suffrage reform bill that was before the Bavarian *Landtag* at that time. In a minute of January 20, 1906, Eyre Crowe – the acknowledged expert on Germany in the Foreign Office's Western Division – wrote, "There is a wide-spread feeling of discontent in many of the German states with the system of 'indirect' elections, framed for the purpose of excluding a representation of the lower ('labouring') classes. The narrowest system, in this respect, prevails in Prussia. The effect of the passing of a more liberal law in Bavaria will certainly be to stimulate the growing agitation in Prussia." The National Archives, FO 371/76; *BFO-CP*, reel 6, no. 2489.

45 See Sir Frank Lascelles to Sir Edward Grey, Berlin (January 26, 1906), The National Archives, FO 371/76, *BFO-CP*, reel 6, no. 3438, describing the SPD's "monster demonstrations" in Berlin in favour of suffrage reform. "Very considerable alarm was felt and expressed in official and 'bourgeois circles' in anticipation of possible excesses and riots, but, although there were some ninety great meetings in Berlin, at which fiery speeches were delivered by Herr [August] Bebel and other Socialist leaders, no attempt whatever was made to parade the streets or to create disturbance, and the day passed off perfectly quietly. Elaborate precautions were taken by the police and all the troops were confined to barracks and marched at intervals through the town."

Reginald Tower⁴⁶ to Sir Edward Grey, No. 15, Munich (January 25, 1906)

Britain's minister resident in Munich cites a speech by Prince Ludwig of Bavaria, son of the prince regent. Tower is correct that, after the speech, Germany was abuzz with the news that the prince supported the general, equal, direct, and secret suffrage, not only for the Reichstag but also for the Landtage of Germany's federal states. The quotation ascribed to Bebel at the end of the report was apparently delivered during Bebel's speeches to SPD faithful in Berlin on "Red Sunday," January 21, 1906.

In my dispatch No 10 of the 14th instant I reported on the Electoral Bill which is now before the Bavarian Diet.

During the sitting on the 4th instant of the special Committee of the Upper House, which I reported in my above-mentioned Despatch, a speech was made by Prince Ludwig of Bavaria⁴⁷ (the eldest son of the Prince Regent and, next to his father, the Heir Presumptive to the Bavarian Throne), which has attracted so much attention in Germany that I feel it my duty to comment upon it and to reproduce it in extenso. His Royal Highness spoke as follows: –

...

He was not enthusiastic about the new Electoral Law [for the Bavarian *Landtag*], but he must acknowledge that it denoted a great advance when compared with the present system. The cases of injustice resulting from the redistribution of seats can easily be rectified. He was aware that the Electoral districts for Reichstag elections, which had originally been approximately uniform in size, showed now, owing to displacement of the population, immense divergences in the voting numbers. Nevertheless, it would be preferable to settle the districts by law rather than to leave these to the local regulations.

He must add a few words in favour of the secret ballot....

In his opinion the secret ballot was a protection of the weak against the strong. Dependents were often made to vote differently to their intentions. There were unscrupulous persons enough who obliged their dependents

46 Reginald Tower (1860–1939) had been a British diplomat since 1885; he served as Britain's minister resident at Munich from 1903 to 1906 and was also accredited to the court of the Kingdom of Württemberg.

47 Prince Ludwig of Bavaria (1845–1921), later King Ludwig III of Bavaria (1913–18). On his famous prickliness toward Prussia, see Frank Lorenz Müller, "'Beware of this Man in Germany, he is dangerous and deceitful!' Prince Ludwig of Bavaria as a *Reichsfeind*," University of St. Andrews, November 2013, http://heirstothethrone-project.net/?page_id=645.

to vote against their convictions. These did not hesitate to discharge servants from their employ in case their votes were not in conformity with their will. In order to obviate evils of this nature every means must be used to assure the secret ballot. On this point the Bill shows a spirit of progress.

The country [continued Prince Ludwig] can congratulate itself upon the existence of a system of election for the German Reichstag which satisfies the majority of the population of the Empire. They had only to look abroad, particularly at countries with fancy systems of election which were in conflict with the popular sense of justice. He was inclined to doubt whether these systems would last much longer. It was quite possible that they would be replaced by radical systems. In his opinion, elections as a rule only gave a faithful reflection of the views of the entire population when there was an equal, universal, direct and secret suffrage.

Bavaria possessed already an equal, universal and secret suffrage. Direct suffrage and redistribution of seats would be effected by the new Electoral Law....

The words of Prince Ludwig have been the subject of much comment in the German press, particularly the concluding assertion that "the country [i.e.. Bavaria] could not settle down" without the passage of the Electoral reform embodied in the present Bill. In view of the many antiquated systems of election in the various German States, the prophecy of Prince Ludwig that "fancy systems" of election would not last much longer and be replaced by "radical systems" of popular election has caused a great flutter, and still greater prominence has been given to the speech by the well-known Deputy Herr Bebel, who, according to the Cologne Gazette,⁴⁸ has said that "If a Prussian Prince in the Prussian Upper House spoke as Prince Ludwig of Bavaria has spoken in the Bavarian Chamber, I think the 'Junkers' would declare him fit for a lunatic asylum. (Much laughter.) Were the German Emperor to be chosen by popular vote from among the German Princes, [continued Bebel], then I think Prince Ludwig of Bavaria would have every chance of becoming German Emperor." (Continued applause and laughter).

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/76; BFO-CF, reel 6, no. 2489.

Sir Frank Lascelles to Sir Edward Grey, No. 17 Confidential, Berlin (January 11, 1907)

Because no useful reports on the Reichstag election campaign of December 1906 to February 1907 emanated from Dresden, this report from

48 *Kölnische Zeitung*, a National Liberal / Free Conservative newspaper.

Berlin cites insider views that Chancellor Bülow has made a huge error in trying to rally liberals and Conservatives against the Catholic Centre and Social Democratic parties. Ambassador Lascelles draws on remarks by the Belgian ambassador in Berlin (Baron Jules Greindl) and the undersecretary of foreign affairs in Berlin (Otto von Mühlberg), both of whose opinions he respects. Even such insiders could not have known the lengths to which Bülow would go, and the electoral resources he would mobilize, to win the 1907 election. But out of his hat Bülow pulled a rabbit, which these contemporaries could not foresee – a stunning election victory for the “parties of order.”

[Chancellor Bülow’s] hope of being able to induce even the National Liberals, and still less the other Liberal groups, to join with the Conservatives in supporting the Government against the Centre and the Social Democrats was, in Baron Greindl’s opinion, quite impracticable. He had, moreover, offered very little inducement to the Liberals to join him. His manifesto,⁴⁹ which in itself was a new departure, as the Chancellor has hitherto avoided taking part in an electoral contest, had failed to please any party. It did not inspire any confidence among the Liberals that the Government would be conducted on more Liberal lines, and it was too Liberal for the Conservatives.... Baron Greindl believed, therefore, that a Chancellor crisis existed, which could not fail to become acute after the elections....

[Dr. von Mühlberg believes that] Prince Bülow had certainly not improved his position by his manifesto, and more especially by choosing General [Eduard] von Liebert as the person to whom to address it. The Association [Imperial League] to which the General was President had been in existence for about two years, had as yet no political importance, and, in fact, the majority of the electors were unaware of its existence. Prince Bülow no doubt thought that he was affording proof of his intention of combating Social Democracy, but his choice of an ultra-Conservative as the recipient of his views had been taken as an indication of his intention of continuing to govern in a Conservative sense. He said that for many years he had advocated the adoption of a more Liberal method of Government; that it was inevitable that a change of system would be brought about in accordance with modern ideas and requirements; and that it was advisable that this change should be brought about gradually, so as to avoid the crash which its sudden introduction

49 This was the “Sylvester Letter” of December 31, 1906, written to the chairman of the Imperial League against Social Democracy, Eduard von Liebert. English text available at *GHDI*, vol. 5, sec. 5.

might involve. He had not been listened to, and he looked forward to the elections with great apprehension.⁵⁰

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/257; *BFO-CP*, reel 11, no. 545.

Sir Frank Lascelles to Sir Edward Grey, No. 32, Berlin (January 27, 1907)

The British ambassador in Berlin reports on initial returns from the Reichstag elections of January 1907.

The first Ballot for the elections to the Reichstag has produced the following results:

Out of the total number of 397, 237 members have been definitely elected and 160 constituencies remain still to be contested in the Second [run-off] Ballot, which takes place between February 2 and 7, the date varying in different districts.

...

The first impression at the results so far achieved has been one of general surprise at the defeat sustained by the Social Democrats in these elections. Of the 20 seats which they have lost, it is significant to find the names of some of the larger towns, such as Königsberg, Halle and Naumburg, which were captured by the "Freisinnigen" [Radicals], and Magdeburg, Leipzig, Reichenbach, Esslingen, which fell to the National Liberals, besides Breslau-West, Pirna, Brunswick, Gotha, (where the Hereditary Prince of Hohenlohe-Langenburg was elected) Saalfeld and Göppingen, whereas their only gain has been Mühlhausen in Alsace, and their former stronghold in the Kingdom of Saxony has up to the present shown a decidedly more Liberal than Socialistic tone.

The National Liberals, besides their gains from the Social-Democrats, have won two Guelph seats in Hanover, and have returned their chief leaders Bassermann, Prince Schönaich-Carolath, Semler, Paasche and Bahn, while they have lost three seats to the Conservatives, who have won seven seats altogether, including Breslau-East, where Prince Hatzfeldt was elected as "free Conservative".

The [Catholic] Centre [Party] alone remains numerically at present exactly as they stood in the elections of 1903 after the first Ballot and both Herr Röhren and Herr Erzberger will appear in the new Reichstag.

50 See also Lascelles's report No. 22 Confidential, Berlin (January 18, 1907), covering most of the same points and conveying just as much pessimism about the elections. The National Archives, FO 371/257; *BFO-CP*, reel 11, no. 545.



Figure 26. “From Bismarck to Buelow. A Bigger Task for a Smaller Man.” The British satirical magazine *Punch* published this cartoon in the middle of the German Reichstag election campaign of January 1907. Almost thirty years earlier, on September 28, 1878, it had published a similar cartoon, showing Chancellor Bismarck trying to wrestle the bogeyman of socialism depicted as a Jack-in-the-box. At that time, Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Law was being debated in the Reichstag. When *Punch* returned to the theme in 1907, it reminded readers of its earlier cartoon (shown in the upper left corner) and suggested that Chancellor Bülow was not up to the task. Both drawings were by Linley Sambourne.

Source: *Punch* (London), vol. 132 (January 16, 1907): 47 / University of Toronto Library / Internet Archive.

Note: For the 1878 *Punch* cartoon, see *GHDI*, vol. 4, sec. 7.

The Press are on the whole jubilant over the decided defeat of Social Democracy, and many of the Liberal papers declare that although the Tower of the Centre stood firm against attack, the maiming of their red ally will so weaken them in the new Reichstag that their support will no longer be a necessity to the Government, while the Clerical "Germania" on the other hand ... prophecies that ... the ideal of a "Liberal Aera" will remain but an idea for many years to come, and the Liberal-Conservative bloc will not long hang together.⁵¹

...

Even in Berlin, where, as in 1903, five Social Democrats have been elected, and the sixth seat remains to be contested again by a Radical and a Social Democrat, at the Second Ballot, the *Norddeutsche [Allgemeine Zeitung]*⁵² points out that the spirit of Social Democracy has reached and passed the high-water mark of its success....

When the news of the results began to be known here late on Friday night, considerable excitement and interest were displayed in all the chief streets of the town, and soon after midnight an orderly but enthusiastic band of several thousand persons marched down the Wilhelmstrasse to Prince Bülow's residence, singing the "Wacht am Rhein" and other national airs, and serenaded the chancellor until he appeared at a window and delivered a short speech, in which he thanked the people for the national spirit which had impelled them to make this demonstration, and quoted the words of Prince Bismarck: "Let us place the German Nation in the saddle, they will know well enough how to ride the horse", adding

51 In a long minute (January 29) attached to this report, Eyre Crowe writes (in part), "If the Reichstag supports the government, the latter will be tempted to use such support for the assertion of world-policy and expansion. If the Reichstag proves obstructive and over critical as regards home affairs, the temptation to go in for a 'sword-rattling' policy might become all the stronger. It will be well to watch such tendencies carefully. Meanwhile it is rather early days for the government to cry victory! The Center party seems if anything to have gained strength; the socialists have lost seats, but it remains uncertain whether they have not actually polled more votes than before; if owing to the strengthening of the [left-liberal] radical parties [illegible on microform] ... [the Government alters] its policy in the direction of liberalism and parliamentarism, well and good: England would only have reason to be glad. But this seems very improbable. And if and when the radicals see that the old reactionary policy and autocratic regime continues (which seems most likely) they will again go into opposition, and the government will, as before, be obliged to come to terms with the Centre, which remains the strongest party." Junior Clerk 1st Class George H. Villiers writes that "Prince Bülow's remarks are somewhat of the 'mailed fist' order," adding tartly: "(This has all been in the papers.)"

52 The semi-official mouthpiece of the Prussian and Reich governments since the days of Bismarck, published in Berlin.

“I hope and believe that the German nation has to-day shown that it still knows how to ride. And if everyone does his duty over the Second Ballot, the whole world will have to recognize that the German Nation is firmly seated in the saddle and is prepared to ride down every obstacle that stands in the path of its welfare and its greatness”.

The Chancellor then raised three cheers for “The nation, the German Nation”, and was met with enthusiastic cries of “Germany, Germany above everything”.

The people then marched in procession, still singing, down the Unter den Linden to the Palace of the Crown Prince, where His Royal Highness and the Crown Princess showed themselves at a window, and finally proceeded to the Emperor’s Palace where they were finally scattered by the tactless and overzealous efforts of the police.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/257; *BFO-CP*, reel 11, no. 545.

Lord Hugh Gough to Sir Edward Grey, No. 2, Dresden (February 6, 1907)

The British envoy in Dresden provides a matter-of-fact report on the outcome of the 1907 Reichstag elections in Saxony (see [table 15](#), included among the reports for January 1912). He does, however, note the extremely high turnout rate in Dresden.

I have the honour to inform you that the general elections for the Reichstag took place on the 25th ultimo, when fifteen elections were completed, second [run-off] ballots taking place yesterday, the 5th instant, in eight places.

The Kingdom of Saxony returns twenty-three members to the Reichstag, and at the last general elections, which took place in 1903, all the Members elected, excepting one, belonged to the Socialist body, which is not counted as one of the regular political parties. The result of the present general elections neither was nor could be foreseen, as an enormous number of voters who did not vote at all in 1903 seem to have come forward on this occasion.

In the Central Dresden [Dresden-Altstadt] division no less than 90 per cent. of the voters recorded their votes, and in the so-called New Town 89 per cent. did likewise, a hitherto unparalleled activity.

Two or three candidates stood as representing all the regular parties, and one of these got in for Pirna, an ancient town close to Dresden, another nearly got in for the suburbs of Dresden, getting 7,000 more votes

than he did in 1903. At the second ballot on the 5th instant, when not one of the Socialists obtained the majority, the successful candidates were supported by their political enemies. Thus in Central Dresden, where Dr. [Rudolf] Heinze,⁵³ a National Liberal, was standing at the second ballot, his special opponent, a Conservative, urged all his political friends to vote for Dr. Heinze. The fact of a voter not having voted at all at the chief election in no way prevents him from voting at the second ballot, but all must be at least 25 years of age.

In the Kingdom of Saxony there are practically no voters of the [Catholic] Centre party, though a Herr [Matthias] Erzberger of the Centre stood for all the twenty-three constituencies. The result of these elections was that, instead of twenty-two Socialists and one member of the [anti-semitic] Reform party as at the last election, there are now two members of the latter party (one of whom, it is true, had meanwhile got in at a bye-election), and both are now re-elected, also –

- 8 Socialists.
- 6 National Liberals.
- 3 Conservatives.
- 1 Reichspartei.
- 1 representing all parties.
- 2 who will sit on the Left of the Chamber (Freisinnige Volkspartei).

Of the eight Socialists, one represents the New Town of Dresden and one represents the suburbs of Dresden; the remainder chiefly belong to the other great manufacturing towns.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/54 (draft); FO 371/257 (final), *BFO-CP*, reel 11, no. 545.

Sir Frank Lascelles to Sir Edward Grey, No. 53, Berlin (February 7, 1907)

From Berlin, Ambassador Lascelles provides the results of the 1907 Reichstag election, citing German national newspapers. His tallies would have been more useful to the Foreign Office than Gough's, and not only because

53 Rudolf Heinze (1865–1923) belonged to the right wing of the National Liberal Party; he served as Saxony's government leader in October–November 1918 and as minister of justice during the Weimar Republic.

Lascelles reports on results across the whole Empire. The main point was the drastic drop in the number of seats won by Social Democrats.

I have the honour to append a table of the numbers of the various political parties finally elected to the Reichstag as a result of the First and Second Ballots, as compared with the results of 1903.

	1907	1903
[German] Conservatives	60	52
German Empire Party ⁵⁴	23	22
[Antisemitic] German Reform [Party]	6	6
Agrarian Union	12	15
[Catholic] Centre	106	104
National Liberals	55	51
[Left-liberal] Radical Parties	48	36
Social Democrats	43	79
Poles	20	16
Other Factions	24	16
Total	397	397

The main feature of these results as foreshadowed in the Ballot of January 25th. has been the collapse of the Social Democrats, whose vote in the Reichstag has sunk to little more than half its numbers in the Reichstag of 1903, (43 instead of 79) and the Socialist organ, the *Vorwärts* [Vorwärts] can only seek consolation in the fact, deduced from the following table of the distribution on votes among the parties, which may be of some interest, that, in spite of their actual defeat, the Socialists, Centre and Poles, who formed the majority of December 13th, last, polled 5,895,000 votes as against the 4,962,000 votes given to the Liberal and Conservative Parties of the [Bülow] Bloc.

	1907	1903	Increase or Diminution
Number of possible voters	13,193,571	12,531,248	+662,323
Votes recorded.			
a. As [percentage] of possible voters	85.4	75.8	
b. Altogether	11,262,574	9,495,587	+1,766,987

⁵⁴ Imperial and Free Conservative Party.

These votes are thus distributed among the parties –⁵⁵

	1907	1903	Increase or Diminution
[German] Conservatives	1,070,658	948,448	+22,210
Empire Party ⁵⁶	447,308	333,404	+133,904
National Liberals	1,654,738	1,313,051	+341,687
Radical Popular Party ⁵⁷	734,582	542,556	+192,026
Radical Union ⁵⁸	243,369*	243,230	+100,139
German Popular Party ⁵⁹ .	147,933	91,217	+56,716
German Reform Party ⁶⁰	94,850	244,543	+204,266
Agrarian Union ⁶¹	353,959		
South German Peasant Union ⁶²	78,121	111,375	-33,254
[Catholic] Centre	2,186,381	1,875,292	+308,089
Poles	453,774	347,784	+105,990
Social Democrats	3,258,968	3,010,771	+248,197
Guelphs, Danes, Alsacians [sic]	172,078	? [sic]	
Other Parties	260,513	? [sic]	
Divided	8,342	11,884	-3,542

At the same time the Centre returns stronger than before, and stands numerically far ahead of the Conservatives who are the second largest party represented in the new Reichstag. The [liberal] Berliner Tageblatt regards this fact as constituting the utter defeat of Prince Buelow at the polls....

It is not easy, under the circumstances to understand the triumphant attitude adopted by the Government in a semi-official communique published by the [Nord-] Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, which contains the following commentary on the result of the elections.

“The patriotic demonstrations made last night before the Royal Schloss and before the residence of the Imperial Chancellor have shown that the populace of Berlin have immediately comprehended the significance of

55 Many of these figures deviate from final, official tallies.

56 Imperial and Free Conservative Party.

57 Freisinnige Volkspartei.

58 Freisinnige Vereinigung. Lascelles obviously made an arithmetical error on this line.

Whereas the total for 1903 is accurate, the Radical Union in 1907 won 338,639 votes, for an increase of about 95,409 votes.

59 Deutsche Volkspartei

60 Deutsche Reformpartei, the principal antisemitic party.

61 Wirtschaftliche Vereinigung.

62 Presumably including the Bayerischer Bauernbund.

the results of yesterday's elections. The joyful satisfaction which made thousands of men throng in their national enthusiasm to the Emperor and the Chancellor, will be shared today by the whole Empire.

...

[The editorial in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* continued:] It is to the German bourgeoisie that the creation of this new Reichstag is due. There is no more significant mark of the elections which have just taken place, than the national determination with which the bourgeois [*bürgerlich*]⁶³ parties, especially in the larger towns, have come forward to the polls.

The Social-Democrat party was spared a still greater defeat by the very party which was formerly wont to consider itself as the firm bulwark against the flood of social-democracy. We believe that this attitude of the Centre will not fail to have its influence upon the position of the various parties. The victory over Social Democracy has been won without, even against, the Centre, and all the more noble therefore is the brilliant result for the victors. Let us rejoice over what we have accomplished, and labour to strengthen and confirm the good that we have gained."

Next to the almost universal satisfaction at the defeat of Social Democracy expressed in the press, there is considerable trepidation among the papers of the Left at the strength in which the Centre returns.... The Centre's own organ, the "Germania" has caused some annoyance and surprise among the other papers ... by posing as the bulwark against Social Democracy, despite the fact that it was owing to the Centre votes in some of the constituencies that the Socialists gained as many seats as they did in the Second Ballot.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/257; *BFO-CP*, reel 11, no. 545.

Fairfax L. Cartwright⁶⁴ to Sir Edward Grey, No. 12 Confidential, Munich (February 9, 1907)

Britain's envoy in Munich, unlike his counterpart in Dresden, reflects on the reasons for Chancellor Bülow's decision to call a snap election. "To anybody with political perspicacity," he writes, it was obvious that

63 "Die bürgerliche Parteien" was a phrase commonly applied to *all* non-socialist parties in Imperial Germany.

64 Fairfax L. Cartwright (1857–1928) was a British author and diplomat who served in Mexico, Lisbon, and Madrid between 1899 and 1906 before taking up the combined posts of British minister resident to Bavaria and Württemberg, based in Munich, until 1908. Thereafter, at the pinnacle of his career, he became British ambassador to Austria-Hungary, where he tried unsuccessfully to break the alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Bülow's central aim was not to secure funding for the war in Southwest Africa or to break permanently with the Catholic Centre Party. Rather, his war on Social Democracy figured centrally in the chancellor's calculation.

In talking to people here it is difficult to find two persons who hold the same views on the subject of the causes of the dissolution.... Why, then, did he [Bülow] seize the present moment for a dissolution?... [He believed] that the present moment was particularly propitious for holding a general election which would call forth the support of all moderate elements in the country in favour of the Imperial policy. Germany is at present passing through a period of extraordinary industrial prosperity, which hides from the working classes any evil effects which the high Customs Tariff may really inflict upon them. Had the Chancellor waited till next year, when the Reichstag would have come to a natural end, there was the possibility in prospect of a decline in the industrial prosperity of the country, and this would have accentuated the high cost of living here, besides giving the Liberal elements the rallying cry which they required to influence the country and bring about a strong opposition in a new Reichstag against the policy of the agrarian party.

Prince Bülow was also not ignorant of the fact that at the present moment a moral depression existed among the Social-Democratic party. For the last few years this party has been the one of negative criticism, opposing every measure of the Government, whether it might or might not be beneficial to the working classes, and it has also encouraged useless and pernicious strikes, which have only resulted in suffering to those engaged in them. But, making every allowance for these facts, I doubt whether Prince Bülow really believed that the Social-Democratic party would, in any true sense of the word, be seriously repulsed by the direct action which he himself was going to take in the elections.

There is no doubt that ... the Social-Democratic party have met with an unexpected moral check, but it would be a mistake to assume, as the inspired press does, that a great reaction has taken place in the country against Liberal ideas. In fact, the notable point about these elections is the large increase of the votes cast for the various Liberal parties, and the increased number of their representatives who will sit in the next Reichstag. The pendulum has swung from the extreme Left to the moderate Left, but not really in the direction of Conservative reaction.

...

Whatever may be thought about the result of the general elections in other parts of Germany, in official circles in Berlin they seem to be satisfied with them – and more than satisfied. We hear shouts of triumph, and the Emperor himself appears at the window of his palace to address the crowd and excite their enthusiasm. It is said that this is the first time since the revolutionary days of 1848 that a Prussian sovereign has addressed

himself directly to his people.⁶⁵ And what are his words on the present occasion? Are they not inspired by that spirit of domination and brutality which have made German policy of late so objectionable to foreign nations, and to those elements in this country who desire to have a little more freedom and the right to criticise the actions of their Government? – “Not only can we ride, but we are in a position to ride down opposition from whatever quarter it may come.” So spoke the Kaiser,⁶⁶ and, in his mind, he must have thought of those pessimists whom he hates.... But has he studied the figures of the votes cast?... If we sum up the votes cast for the parties who formed the opposition to the Government in the vote taken in the Reichstag on the 13th December last, we find that the Social Democrats polled 3,250,000, the Centre 2,275,000 and the Poles 550,000 – a total of 6,075,000. The supporters of the Government received at the general elections: Conservatives, 1,945,000, the National Liberals, 1,570,000, and the Radicals 1,212,000 – in all, 4,282,000. Thus, although in Parliament the Government – owing to the peculiar arrangements of the electorate districts – obtained a majority, it would appear that, as far as the public is concerned, the weight of opinion lies with the Opposition.... It would therefore be a mistake to imagine that the Parliamentary triumph of the Government meets with a very decided approval on the part of the nation at large, and even the victory obtained over the Social-Democratic party partakes more of the nature of a drawn fight than of the infliction of a crushing defeat upon them.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/257; *BFO-CP*, reel 11, no. 545.

**Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay⁶⁷ to Sir Edward Grey, No. 35
Confidential, Dresden (October 1, 1907)**

*The new British envoy to Saxony outlines the prospects for the Saxon government's suffrage reform plan, first announced in July 1907.*⁶⁸ He

65 It is certainly true that no Prussian king or German emperor had ever made a public pronouncement after a national election before.

66 When Frank Lascelles stepped down as British Ambassador in Berlin, Fairfax Cartwright was proposed to succeed him, but Kaiser Wilhelm II refused to accept his appointment, wishing for a figure of higher social or military rank. Sir Edward Goschen was chosen instead, serving from 1908 to 1918; Cartwright replaced Goschen in Vienna.

67 Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay (1861–1932) first joined Britain's diplomatic service as an attaché in 1885. He served at Stockholm, Constantinople, Vienna, Buenos Aires, and Belgrade. In May 1907 he was appointed minister resident at the courts of Saxony and Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, and chargé d'affaires at the court of Waldeck and Pyrmont, where he served until June 1909.

68 Two minutes attached to this report are revealing. One by Ronald Hugh Campbell, Jr., Clerk, 2nd Class, reads, “This is part of the general movement throughout Germany for Electoral Reform. Count Hohenthal's scant Concessions will probably not appease

notes that "Saxony is geographically the spot where the conflicting currents of political opinion meet – the reactionary ultra-Conservative current from the north, and the Liberal current from the south," adding that "the current now appears to be setting from the Liberal south." He concludes, rightly, that Saxony's reform will have important implications for suffrage reform in Prussia.

As you are aware, the Saxon Landtag is called together once every two years, and every two years fresh elections are held in one-third of the constituencies except in case of a general dissolution.

The elections which have just taken place have resulted in a gain of eight seats for the National Liberals, but the Conservative majority is not endangered by the loss.

The approaching Session may prove more interesting than usual, as the new Electoral Reform Bill will have to be considered....

[Findlay briefly reviews the history of Saxon suffrage reform from 1868 to 1903.] ...

In view of this discontent [raised by the three-class suffrage of 1896], Minister [Georg von] Metzsch attempted in 1901 [*sic* for 1904] to pass a reform mitigating the rigour of this exclusion of the Liberal elements of the population. The Upper House ..., backed by Conservatives in the ... Chamber of Deputies, refused, however, to listen to any idea of reform, and the Saxon Socialists who returned such a strong body of representatives to the Reichstag continued to be excluded from their own Parliament. This system still exists, and Count [Wilhelm von] Hohenthal,⁶⁹ who for many years represented Saxony in Berlin, was recalled in order to draw up a moderate measure of reform which might mitigate the discontent of the industrial and labouring classes, and which at the same time might be accepted by the Conservative majority in the Landtag. This Count Hohenthal has done with the assistance of Baron [Alfred] von Nostitz-Wallwitz,⁷⁰ a young man of considerable promise who has served

the Liberals." The second, by G.H. Villiers, Jr., Clerk, 1st Class, reads, "It is curious that the Saxon Socialists who have found seats in the German Reichstag should be excluded from the Saxony Landtag" (with instruction to copy Findlay's report to Berlin.)

69 Count Karl Adolf Philip *Wilhelm* von Hohenthal und Bergen (1853–1909), former Saxon envoy to Prussia (1885–1906), was Saxon interior and foreign minister and de facto government leader from May 1, 1906 until July 1, 1909. He died on September 29, 1909, less than three months after his retirement.

70 Alfred von Nostitz-Wallwitz (1870–1953) was the nephew of Saxony's former minister of the interior, Hermann von Nostitz-Wallwitz. He became an influential government advisor on suffrage questions after 1906 and served as minister of culture in

with Count Hohenthal at Berlin, and who now occupies the post of Assistant Under-Secretary at the Saxon Foreign Office, though his work has been mainly connected with the preparation of the Electoral Reform Bill. Baron Nostitz has travelled much and read much; he might be described as a Liberal Conservative; he is intelligent and a good speaker, and has been of the greatest assistance to his chief. He strikes me as a man who has a career before him.

The Reform Bill which Count Hohenthal and Baron Nostitz have elaborated is of great length and is quite extraordinarily complicated.⁷¹ I imagine these complications are intended to veil the scanty nature of the concessions granted from the gaze of the masses.⁷² The authors of the Bill have probably calculated that the more highly educated classes now represented by the Conservative majority in the Landtag might possibly accept it if they could be induced to go through the species of intellectual gymnastics necessary to grasp the fact that this Reform Bill, which appeared to threaten their power, by no means did so, and merely amounted to the allotment of a few seats, in the roundabout manner which appears dear to the German mind, to minorities, that is to say, to the professional, industrial, and labouring interests. I speak of electoral minorities; numerically these classes are the majority of the population.

Doubtless foreseeing that the Conservatives would take some time fully to realize the comparatively anodyne nature of his Reform Bill, Count Hohenthal caused it to be published before his departure on leave in July, and left it to sink in. It was received with unanimous condemnation by the Conservative press and with scant gratitude by those among the classes it is by way of benefiting, who were intellectually capable of rapidly perceiving how little they were likely to get. Count Hohenthal had, however, acted wisely. The Conservatives began slowly to perceive that the dreaded Reform Bill was nothing so very dreadful after all. They have gradually climbed down from the position they had at first assumed, and it now appears not improbable that the Bill will be accepted by the Chamber of Deputies. In fact the recent gain of eight seats by the

October–November 1918. On his suffrage schemes and on his efforts to push Saxon Conservatives toward reform, see Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 382–7, 451–4.

71 A copy of the *Entwurf zum Wahlgesetz für die Zweite Kammer der Ständeversammlung* (announced early July 1907) is found in the Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, PAV, Karton Nr. 53.

72 The “masses” were not left in the dark. The Saxon SPD leader Hermann Fleißner wrote in *Die Neue Zeit* 25 (1907), 563, “The liberals get the plural system, the small reactionary corporative bodies (*Mittelstand*, national workers’ associations, etc.) get proportional representation, Social Democracy gets a nugget of free suffrage, while the lion’s share will go, as always, to the Conservatives.”

National Liberals is held by some to have insured its acceptance and to be a sign of the times.

The Chamber of Deputies consists of eighty-two members. If the Reform Bill becomes law forty-two members (that is to say, a majority of the Chamber) will be elected in practically the same manner as at present by indirect voting of three classes of electors.⁷³ The remaining forty members will be elected by direct voting. There will also be various complicated contrivances which are intended to secure the representation of electoral minorities.

You will perceive from the above that the electoral policy of the Saxon Government has in the past been subject to a certain amount of flux and reflux. Saxony is geographically the spot where the conflicting currents of political opinion meet – the reactionary ultra-Conservative current from the north, and the Liberal current from the south. The meeting of these two currents occasionally causes a certain commotion in the usually placid pool of Saxon politics. The current now appears to be setting from the Liberal south. There is a demand for electoral reform even in Prussia, and if the Saxon Reform Bill is successfully carried through the Landtag the reformers in Prussia will probably be encouraged.

It remains to be seen whether the Socialists will be appeased by the scanty sop offered them by Count Hohenthal. At first sight it looks as if his Excellency had said to the rising tide, “Thus far, but no farther,” and that his commands could not in the end be more successful than those of King Canute. I must observe, however, that as far as I can judge the tide is not flowing very strongly, and that Count Hohenthal’s peace offering is probably intended to conciliate the industrial and professional classes rather than the Socialists. In this he may possibly to a certain extent succeed.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/262; BFO-CP, reel 16, no. 33969.

**Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay to Sir Edward Grey, No. 54
Confidential, Dresden (December 11, 1907)**

Findlay reports on the Saxon government’s initial difficulties rallying support for its suffrage reform bill in the Landtag session of 1907/8. Government leader Hohenthal made a good impression, but his chief

73 This aspect of the government’s 1907 reform proposal – partial indirect voting with a three-class division of electors – disappeared in subsequent negotiations leading to the final legislation of 1909.

“suffrage expert,” Government Councillor Georg Heink, certainly did not. In fact his speech was a fiasco.

Count Hohenthal formally introduced his Franchise Bill on the 5th instant in a short and energetic speech. After stating that the King, in appointing him Minister, had specially charged him with the difficult task of reforming the franchise in a manner calculated to remove the causes for the growing discontent which has prevailed among those classes of the population who are inadequately represented in the Landtag under the present system of class voting, His Excellency declared that the objects of his bill were “to secure for the Landtag as much as possible of the valuable strength and ability to be found among the people and before all [i.e., first and foremost] to protect those elements of Saxon society which were friendly to the State from being swamped by those which were hostile to it.”

I may incidentally observe that the words which I have underlined appeared to be the keynote of the complicated composition of Count Hohenthal’s Bill, and that the single Socialist Deputy⁷⁴ in the Landtag had some reason to say, as he did later in the debate, that the “whole of the government proposals were dominated by fear of the Social Democrats.”

Count Hohenthal concluded his speech with a general statement that his Bill had been drawn up in order to satisfy, as far as possible, the popular demand for representation; that it was essentially a compromise, and as such could not be entirely pleasing to any individual party – a compromise was, however, demanded by the situation, and he appealed to all parties to co-operate with the Government in finding the best compromise possible under the circumstances

Count Hohenthal then called on Regierungsrat Heink⁷⁵ to explain the Bill to the House in detail. This Herr Heink did in a bureaucratic and doctrinaire manner, which somewhat spoiled the good effect of Count Hohenthal’s energetic but, upon the whole, conciliatory speech.

Among other somewhat tactless remarks, Herr Heink expressed his confidence that the proposed election of some of the members of the Landtag by the “Communal Verbände,” which are practically equivalent to County Councils, would, while keeping out Socialists, contribute to “raise the intellectual level of the House.” The House not unnaturally failed to appreciate this remark.

⁷⁴ Hermann Goldstein.

⁷⁵ Georg Heink (b. 1850) had served as district governor in Annaberg (1897–1900) and in Leipzig (1901–6); in 1907 he was a senior councillor in the Saxon ministry of the interior.

Herr Heink's tactlessness served as a lightning-conductor, and the subsequent speakers emptied the vials of their wrath upon him, rather than upon Count Hohenthal.

The Conservative party declared their willingness to deal with the Government Bill in a spirit of conciliation, provided that the Government were prepared to make such concessions as might appear advisable.

Nevertheless, as soon as the Bill came to be discussed in detail, the Conservatives and the more Liberal parties, in still greater degree, had so much fault to find with Count Hohenthal's proposals that the Bill would seem to have little chance of passing in its present form. All parties seemed to desire a simplification of the franchise, and objected to the very different systems of election which Count Hohenthal proposed to introduce and to maintain in side by side.

Perhaps, owing to Herr Heink's unfortunate remark, there appeared to be a general consensus of opinion against the return of Deputies by the "Communal Verbände" (County Councils), and I think it may be taken for granted that the Government will drop this part of their proposals.

It was finally decided that the Bill should be referred to a committee of twenty-one members of the House.

The only clear result of this debate is that the necessity for a reform of the existing franchise was frankly recognized by all parties. It would be rash to prophecy what shape the Reform Bill will ultimately assume, but universal suffrage, greatly modified by the distribution of plural votes to the wealthier and better educated classes, appears at present to find most favour. It must be borne in mind that the Bill, even if passed by the Second Chamber, or House of Commons, must also be passed by the First or Upper House.

The Social Democrats held mass meetings on Sunday last in Dresden, Leipzig, and Chemnitz, at which Resolutions were passed demanding the immediate introduction of universal suffrage and of free and secret voting. The meetings at Dresden and Leipzig passed off quietly, but at Chemnitz the police had to clear the streets. I hear that Count Hohenthal had instructed the local authorities to avoid interference as far as possible.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/262; BFO-CP, reel 16, no. 41084.

Sir Frank Lascelles to Sir Edward Grey, No. 35, Berlin (January 23, 1908)

While Saxony struggled to push forward reform of its Landtag suffrage, Chancellor Bülow on January 9, 1908, announced that his government

in Prussia did not yet see any possible path toward meaningful revision of its own Landtag suffrage. Even before that announcement, and continuing for days after it, demonstrations involving as many as 30,000 people disturbed the peace of central Berlin (and its suburbs).⁷⁶ In this report the British ambassador provides some details about a demonstration in Berlin on January 21, 1908, and expresses his disapproval of Social Democratic tactics.

The crowd, composed chiefly of young workmen of from 18 to 20 years old, bakers, butchers, carpenters etc out of employment, gathered on the Schiffbauerdamm, singing and crying “Down with Bülow! Franchise Reform”, and after being dispersed there several times by the police, who according to accounts of eyewitnesses, handled them very roughly at this point, attacking unresisting young fellows savagely with their swords, met late in the afternoon on the square in front of the Reichstag, where they were joined by some workmen who were repairing a theatre in the vicinity.

Here it came to a lively contest between the police and the demonstrators, who used stones as weapons, one man among them even firing a revolver; the police resorted to their sabers, and slashed open a good many heads and arms. Considerable damage was done on both sides, though no one was killed; some half dozen policemen were taken to the neighboring ‘Charité’ hospital, where many of the demonstrators who are variously estimated at from 1600 to 12000 were also brought for treatment.

Yesterday the town was closely guarded by policemen, especially in the vicinity of the Reichstag but no renewal of the disturbances occurred; and the authorities are congratulating themselves that there has been no need to call out the soldiery....

In other parts of the country similar demonstrations have taken place during the past few days probably partly in consequence of the feeling of discontent at present prevailing among the working classes owing to the want of employment, which as usual is especially noticeable in the winter months. At Hanover and Magdeburg disturbances are reported, and at Brunswick yesterday, on the opening of the Diet, a noisy gathering of unemployed and Socialists who paraded the town singing Marseillaise, had to be dispersed eventually by the police officials.

In the meanwhile, in the Reichstag yesterday, the Socialist Interpolation on the franchise question was occupying the attention of the House....

⁷⁶ See also Sir Frank Lascelles to Sir Edward Grey, No. 20, Berlin (January 13, 1908), FO 371/457, BFO-CP, reel 18, no. 2014.

Prince Bülow replied to these questions in a short speech which was constantly interrupted by loud cheers from the Conservatives and equally loud hoots and jeers from the Socialists.... [T]he Chancellor said that the police and military authorities had taken such measures as seen necessary for the preservation of public order and he refused therefore to answer the interpolation. But he desired to take the opportunity to speak a word of warning to the country with regard to the disturbances which had occurred on the previous day. It was not the custom in Germany to carry politics into the street; order must be preserved at all costs, and energetic measures would be taken if necessary to see that it was procured. He was convinced that he had all the respectable (bürgerlichen) parties at his back, in his determination to suppress the unseemly riots, which had taken place, and he gave the Social Democrats serious warning to depart from the policy of agitation which they have been carrying on since January 12th last.... The rest of the debate was of no special interest, unless perhaps for the unanimous front shown by all the Radical parties of every shade in their determination to fight for the reform of the franchise and pressure and to face the next elections with that aim primarily in view.

The Socialists are playing a dangerous and foolish game in encouraging the disorders and agitation among the unemployed throughout the country; they are only alienating more than ever all the parties of order, and giving the government an excuse to modify any measures of social reform they may have in view; as the National Liberal member, Herr [Ernst] Bassermann, pointed out, the Bill regarding the Right of Meeting and Association,⁷⁷ which is at present in the hands of a Commission, will probably suffer considerable modifications in the reactionary sense as a result of the events of the past few days.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/457; *BFO-CP*, reel 18, no. 2015.

**Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay to Sir Edward Grey, No. 13
Confidential, Dresden (March 16, 1908)**

Negotiations between the Saxon government and the "parties of order" over Saxony's Landtag suffrage are stalled, although, as Findlay reports, the parliamentary debates are not without fireworks.

In my dispatch No. 54 Confidential of December 11. 1907, I had the honour to report that the Bill containing Count Hohenthal's proposals

77 The Imperial Association Law (*Reichsvereinsgesetz*) of April 19, 1908.

for reform of the Saxon franchise had been referred to a Committee of the Landtag. In consequence of a resolution which has been much criticized in the Liberal and Socialist press, the deliberations of this Committee were held with closed doors and little transpired as to the progress made.

Gradually the Liberal and Socialist parties seemed to lose interest in the Saxon franchise reform, and they appeared to be concentrating their attention on the demands made for electoral reform in Prussia. In the course of a recent conversation I laughingly congratulated Count Hohenthal upon the easy time he appeared to be enjoying, and asked him how he had contrived to mollify the Social-Democrats. He replied that he did not himself quite understand his immunity from attack. He supposed, however, that the Social Democrats had realized that he was determined to extend the franchise considerably, and that being sure of getting some advantage in Saxony, they were concentrating their attention on Prussia with a view to obtaining an equivalent advantage there. In any case the apparent truce would not be of long duration. Little progress had been made. Time was passing quickly, and some decision must shortly be arrived at. I was therefore not surprised to hear about a week later that Count Hohenthal had addressed a sort of ultimatum to the Committee of the Landtag desiring them to hasten their deliberations and to finally consider the Government Bill, instead of wasting time in an endless discussions [*sic*] of proposals which the Government regarded as impracticable and which they therefore were unable to accept.

The news of this “ultimatum” having leaked out, the press again took up the subject of electoral reform, the liberal papers directing their criticisms chiefly to the secrecy in which the deliberations of the Committee had been shrouded. A plenary sitting of the Landtag was held to consider a resolution embodying these criticisms, which had been brought forward by two “Freisinnige” [Radical] deputies.

As the debate promised to be interesting I went down to the Landtag to hear what passed.

Just before my arrival, however, there had been a stormy scene in which the public present in the galleries joined to such an extent that the president⁷⁸ ordered the galleries to be cleared. I was therefore refused admittance.

I learn, however, that after a somewhat acrimonious debate the question of electoral reform was referred back to the Committee with the request, on the part of Count Hohenthal, that they should devote their

78 The de facto leader of Saxon Conservatives, Paul Mehnert.

attention to the Government proposals with a view to arriving at an early decision.

In the meantime Count Hohenthal, whose health has suffered from over-strain, is going to Meran for a short period of rest. He told me that the Government Bill would not be discussed during his absence, and implied his hope that in the meantime the various members with Bills of their own, would have talked themselves to a standstill. There has been some talk of Count Hohenthal's position being shaken, I learn, however, on good authority, that the King⁷⁹ has recently addressed an autograph letter to Count Hohenthal assuring him of his full confidence, and his influence in the Landtag is steadily increasing.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/459; BFO-CP, reel 19, no. 9935.⁸⁰

**Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay to Sir Edward Grey, No. 16
Confidential, Dresden (April 16, 1908)**

The plot thickens. That is the gist of Findlay's report on the complicated negotiations over suffrage reform currently underway among the non-socialist parties in Saxony and between them and government leader Count Hohenthal. The envoy lists provisions of the suffrage proposals still being debated, including many that were eventually discarded before final agreement was reached in January 1909 (for example, compulsory voting).⁸¹

Count Hohenthal [returned from leave] about ten days ago.

In the meantime all sorts of reports appeared in the papers as to a compromise between the Conservative and National Liberal parties, on the attitude of which the fate of the franchise reform depends, as they together constitute the majority of two-thirds of the House which is required for altering the existing franchise. These rumours of compromise were constantly contradicted, and it is not yet clear that the parties in question know their own minds. Count Hohenthal told me a few days ago that no definite decision has been arrived at, and that proposals

⁷⁹ Saxon King Friedrich August III (1865–1932, ruled 1904–18).

⁸⁰ Drafts of Findlay's reports throughout 1908 were also consulted in The National Archives, FO 215/55.

⁸¹ An unidentified minute attached to this report reads, "The Conservative & National Liberal majority have still made no definite proposals to Count Hohenthal whose position is becoming difficult. Universal voting likely to be proposed with various barriers against the Social Democrats."

which were made to him in the morning were generally withdrawn or altered before the evening. He was therefore simply waiting for the situation to clear.

It is, however, practically certain that the two parties above mentioned are, upon the whole, in favour of a uniform and universal franchise and of secret voting, and that they propose as barriers against the Social Democrats the addition of four “plural” votes, dependent on —

1. Property and education.
2. Settled residence and age.

Further, the Committee of the Landtag has reported in favour of a two years’ residence in Saxony as a necessary qualification for voters, and of a four years’ residence for candidates. They also decided in favor of compulsory voting (“Wahlpflicht”). They consider this to be necessary, as, while the Social Democrats may always be expected to whip up every possible vote and to vote solid, the other parties cannot be depended on to do so, and therefore the barrier which it is proposed to build across the path of social democracy by the addition of “plural” votes may be rendered useless. It is also proposed that the Members of the present House of Deputies should be increased from eighty-two to ninety-six, and that there should be a redistribution of seats. This redistribution would probably be used to give the non-Socialist country districts preponderance over the urban constituencies.

Count Hohenthal does not consider that these proposals provide sufficient security against the dreaded inundation of the House by the Social Democrats, and, so far, he maintains his opinion that this object can be better attained by the proposal incorporated in his own Bill, namely, that while about half the House should be elected by uniform, universal, and secret voting, modified by the addition of votes for certain qualifications, the remainder should be elected by indirect voting by Corporations, such as County and District Councils (“Communal- und Bezirks-Verbände”). Count Hohenthal told me that he was not prepared to abandon the proposed election by Corporations. It is reported, however, that he has reduced the number of seats to be filled in this manner to thirty-one, and I cannot help thinking that he will have to make further concessions.

As I had the honor to report in my despatch No 35 of the 1st October, 1907, Count Hohenthal’s Franchise Bill, in its original form, was so complicated as to be almost incomprehensible. I am inclined to think that he himself sees clearly the advantages of a simple franchise. He is, however, in a difficult position. He has not only to get a majority of two-thirds in the Lower, or Second Chamber, but has also to secure the assent of the

Upper Chamber and of his colleagues in the Government. On the other hand, if he decides on a dissolution,⁸² he has little chance of bettering his position. The tide of Liberal feeling is distinctly rising, and the dissatisfaction with the existing franchise is universal. It is generally admitted that something must be done to remove the prevailing discontent if serious trouble is to be avoided.

It is possible that when the Landtag meets again after Easter some practicable compromise may be arrived at. Count Hohenthal is a man of the world, and by no means bigoted. It is, therefore, unlikely that he will lose any opportunity of coming to an agreement with the Conservatives and National Liberals, if this can be effected by mutual concessions.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/459; *BFO-CP*, reel 19, no. 9935.



Figure 27. A family of home workers in the Saxon Ore Mountains (*Erzgebirge*), making wooden children's toys. Photograph from 1909.

Source: bpk Bildagentur / Art Resource, NY.

82 Meaning dissolution of the *Landtag* over the impasse, and the calling of new elections.

Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnell Findlay to Sir Edward Grey, No. 19,
Dresden (May 13, 1908)

Interrupting his flow of reports on Saxon suffrage reform, Findlay sends a report on the “Housing Question in Dresden.” He draws interesting (though idiosyncratic) contrasts between the British and Saxon working classes and the challenges they face in rapidly modernizing urban environments. Much of what he reports about Dresden workers is seen through rose-coloured glasses (e.g., their ability to enjoy comfortable housing, good food and entertainment, and convivial family outings).

One of the things that struck me on my first arrival in Dresden was the apparent prosperity and the respectable appearance of the population, including the working classes, and the total absence of the squalid streets which are nearly always to be found in an English or a Scotch town of the same size and population viz: over half a million.

I naturally have endeavoured to trace the causes of this phenomenon, and now venture to submit the result of my observations.

1. The dwelling houses in Dresden are almost exclusively constructed on the flat system, and the building of new houses and streets is carefully regulated by the Municipality, the result being fine wide streets and handsome houses tenanted by several families, one or two of which at least are well-to-do with a certain standard of cleanliness and comfort. In almost every one of these houses there are poorer, (workmen’s) families who inhabit either the top story or the basement, and some members of which are frequently employed to sweep the staircase or in other ways, thus adding to the outside earnings of the breadwinner.

The result of this system is the prevention of the aggregation of poverty and of the consequent squalor characteristic of the slums of London, Glasgow and of most of our other big towns.

The physical and moral contamination to which our poorer working classes are exposed by having to herd with a still poorer and less law-abiding part of the population is also prevented.

The poorer families who inhabit the top stories and basements of Dresden houses enjoy many advantages which would not be within their reach under the system prevalent in England, such as a good water supply and sanitation which – if not perfect – is at any rate superior to what they could otherwise attain. The various small jobs they perform, either for the landlord, or for the richer tenants, are an invaluable resource when the breadwinner of the family is temporarily out of work, and the fear of losing such employment is a constant stimulus to keep up a cleanly and respectable appearance, to sobriety, and indirectly to thrift. It can

hardly be doubted that the military training through which the mass of the population have passed lays the foundation of the desire to appear smart, or at least respectable.

2. I have dealt with the absence of mean streets. I now turn to the absence of extreme poverty which is especially remarkable at a time when German industries are suffering in sympathy with the general depression in Trade.

In a population of over half a million there must be a certain number of unemployed. But in Dresden these are quickly absorbed owing to the fact that, though there are a large number of factories, there is no staple industry. The factories in and round Dresden (they are distributed for miles up and down the Elbe) manufacture almost every conceivable article. The result is that there is rarely a depression in all these industries at once.

If one factory has to pay off hands, they are almost invariably taken on by another, and the transfer is facilitated by the admirable, cheap, and widespreading [sic] system of municipal tram-ways, which enable a workman to get quickly to and from his work over considerable distances.

I have already mentioned the fact that the wife, or some other member of most working families, have some secondary employment which helps them over bad times.

...

It may be urged that the average German is very different from the average Briton. There are undoubtedly points of difference, but there are also many points of similarity. The German, in Saxony at least, is less individualistic and more accustomed to have everything done for him by the Government, with the result that he has, I should say, as a rule, less initiative and less character. He is, however, more thrifty and, generally more sober; as far as I can see, sobriety is made much easier for him.

The comparative absence of drunkenness is, I am convinced, greatly due to the system under which the restaurants, and places of entertainment are conducted. Everywhere food is taken, or is, at any rate, obtainable with a glass of beer, and is both good and cheap. The accommodation provided is also adequate, and generally includes a garden and a band in summer, where the workman takes his supper and a glass of beer or so, accompanied by his family. It is obvious that the company of his hardworking and economic better-half cannot fail to put the drag on extravagance and intemperance. It would also appear obvious that the bar system directly conduces to drinking for drinking's sake, and yet I have recently been told on good authority that British magistrates are generally averse to granting licences for the class of restaurant (with garden and band) where the German workman and his family take their supper. I am aware that it is urged that the British workman would not

avail himself of such places even if they were at his disposal, but I am not aware that he has ever, except in exceptional cases, had the chance.

If it be urged that the average workman in this part of Germany has a better chance than in Great Britain, I can only say that as far as I am able to ascertain it is not the case. Wages are, as a rule, not higher, and the necessities of life are very much dearer (almost double the price) owing to the protective duties on food stuffs.

...

There are some things in which Dresden is, so far, still behind-hand e.g. drainage. Nevertheless the death-rate is one of the lowest in Europe, and if this result can be attained with the existing defective system of drainage and of sanitary inspection, it may be fairly attributed to the general building plan which prevents the aggregation of poverty, misery, and consequent disease, and which provides the airy streets and gardens which are the lungs as well as the ornament of the town....

I venture to urge that what has been done in Dresden, could be done under similar circumstances in many British towns and with equally satisfactory results as regards the health, sobriety, and general well-being of the population.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/460; BFO-CP, reel 20, no. 17403.

**Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay to Sir Edward Grey, No. 24
Confidential, Dresden (May 27, 1908)**

Negotiations over suffrage reform in Saxony are still stalled. Government leader Hohenthal has sent the Landtag into summer recess, in the hope of compelling the "parties of order" to agree on a compromise. In the meantime Saxon Social Democrats seem more interested in reforming Prussia's own three-class suffrage.

It was hoped that when the Chambers re-assembled after the Easter recess, a compromise between the dominant parties and the Government would have been arrived at, approximately on the lines indicated in the above-mentioned despatch [No. 16, April 16, 1908].

Count Hohenthal, however, appears not to have been satisfied with the guarantees offered, and the dominant parties themselves do not seem to have known their own minds sufficiently well to be in a position to exercise the pressure required in order to force the hands of the Government.

I need not trouble you with an account of the various proposals which have been put forward, as no compromise has been arrived at, and Count

Hohenthal told me a few days ago that the Landtag will shortly adjourn till the autumn, when a fresh attempt will be made to arrive at an agreement upon the subject of Franchise reform.

As I have already reported, the general tendency has been to modify each proposal, almost as soon as made, in a more liberal sense. It would, therefore, appear doubtful whether the Government have much to gain by temporising.

So far the Reform Bill does not seem to have led to any very violent agitation outside the Landtag, and the Social Democrats are curiously quiet. As far as can be judged from the tone of their leading papers their attention is chiefly occupied by Imperial affairs, especially finance, and by the Franchise question in Prussia.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/459; BFO-CP, reel 19, no. 9935.

**Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay to Sir Edward Grey, No. 21
Confidential, Dresden (December 8, 1908)**

After more than a year of grandstanding and foot-dragging, members of the lower chamber of the Saxon Landtag rejected the tentative compromise, based on a system of plural ballots – whereby ballots would be counted one, two, three, or four times depending on electoral privileges accorded to the voter. Such a system had long been discussed as the most viable suffrage reform. But other issues were involved, such as the redistribution of electoral districts to reduce the advantage Conservatives enjoyed in the over-represented rural districts. The main nay-sayers had been the National Liberals. This prompted the government of Count Hohenthal to propose an alternative bill, which Findlay outlines in detail. It was a radical solution to the impasse, for it divided Saxon Landtag voters into only two groups: group 1, whose ballot would be counted four times, and group 2, whose ballot would count only once. But that bill, too, was defeated, leaving the Conservatives to carry their own bill, based on their slim majority in the chamber. Count Hohenthal finds the Conservatives' bill "quite unacceptable." He hopes – correctly, as it turned out in January 1909 – that it will be revised again in the Saxon upper chamber.⁸³

83 Two minutes are attached to Findlay's report. One by G.H. Villiers reads, "No real reform at all. The new bill is anything but democratic." The other by an unidentified colleague reads, "Count Hohenthal's original proposals for an extension of the franchise were laid before a Committee of the Chamber last Dec. They have been whittled

I have the honour to report that the Second Chamber of the Saxon Landtag (Chamber of Deputies) voted last week on the Government Franchise Bill and declined to accept it by a small majority.

An alternative bill which the Government had prepared in view of the probable rejection of its original proposals, was then carried by the small majority of three, but only after the Conservatives had carried amendments striking out various constitutional changes which really were the essence of the Bill.

The alternative Bill which will now have to be considered by the 1st or Upper Chamber, may be summarised as follows:

The voters are divided into two groups.

To group 1 belong

1. Voters possessing landed property which pays 100 taxation units of land of which at least 4 hectares are either agricultural or fruit farm, or of which one acre is used for market gardening or vineyard.

2. Voters with an income exceeding 2200 Marks (£110).

3. Public or other employés drawing salaries of at least 1800 Marks (£90).

4. Voters who are entitled to vote for the Chambers of Commerce.

5. Voters who hold the Educational certificate entitling them to serve in the army for one year only.

Votes of the above group to count four.

Group 2. includes the rest of the voters who have a single vote.

In debate a second vote was given to members of this group possessing a certain age qualification.

The Government further proposed that

a. General elections for the whole 2nd Chamber should take place every six years instead of the present system of renewing the Chamber by one-third at a time.

b. The number of the members of the Second Chamber was to be increased.

c. A redistribution of seats.

These latter proposals (a,b,c) were thrown out by the Conservatives so that as what was left of the Bill contained no constitutional changes, it could be passed by a bare majority instead of a majority of two-thirds.

When I saw Count Hohenthal last Friday [December 4] he told me he was much disappointed; that for the last year he had laboured to give the

down to such an extent that but little remained of the original proposals – & even in that state have been rejected. It is evidently as difficult in Saxony as in Prussia to carry any proposals for widening the suffrage.”

country a satisfactory franchise; that his original Bill (which as I had the honour to report was an extremely complicated one) had been whittled down in Committee till little remained of it, and even then the parties who had reduced it to that state had rejected it. That his alternative Bill in the state to which it had been reduced by the conservative amendments, was quite unacceptable, and that he could only hope that it would be re-amended in the 1st Chamber.

Count Hohenthal has certainly had bad luck. A quarrel, with the details of which I need not trouble you, broke out between the National Liberals in the Chamber and the President on the eve of the Franchise debate. The Conservatives supported their President and leader, Herr [Paul] Mehnert, with the result that it became impossible for the Conservatives and National Liberals to act together. The result is a complete fiasco. As far as I have been able to understand Count Hohenthal's original Bill, it was designed to admit a limited number of Socialist members (about 15) and at the same time to disguise the manner in which the limit was maintained. The Alternative Bill as passed is generally held to leave things practically as they are.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/459; BFO-CP, reel 19, no. 9935.

Honorary Consul E.C. Trench⁸⁴ to Sir Edward Grey, Dresden, No. 6 Confidential (January 19, 1909) (draft)

Saxony's suffrage reform crisis is over, but the final legislation pleases no one. Social Democrats launch large protest rallies at the eleventh hour but are powerless to prevent passage of a suffrage reform that virtually ensures they will never win a majority of seats in the Landtag.

I have the honour to report that the Committee of the Chamber of Deputies have drawn up a bill based on the agreement arrived at with the President & party leaders of the Upper Chamber.

The Bill is prefaced by a review of the proceedings of the Committee during its nine sittings, together with the proposals of the various members, then follows the text of the new Bill consisting of forty-one paragraphs & finally the division of the constituencies. The salient features of the new Bill are contained in paragraphs 1, 2 & 11....

*[Trench outlines these provisions in multiple paragraphs, mainly as they finally passed into law on May 5, 1909.]*⁸⁵

84 E.C. Trench is deputizing for Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay, who left Dresden for good in June 1909.

85 See the excerpt from the final law, included below.

The bill will be laid before the 2nd Chamber tomorrow, when the majority (two-thirds) necessary to its becoming law is practically assured, while the government has also promised its support.

The Press, with the exception of the Socialist papers, though not enthusiastic, welcome the measure as a considerable improvement on the existing Law.

There is a sigh of relief that something, at least, has been attained which, without being ideal, may well satisfy the reasonable expectations of the population.

Fears are, however, here and there expressed, that voting by the Plural System, as it is worked out in the new Bill, will offer the Socialists a favourable opportunity of securing a considerable number of seats in the 2nd Chamber (there is at present only one member), for apart from the clause which allots an extra vote to all electors over 50, the conditions which make the number of votes allowed dependent on income, will enable a considerable portion of the working classes to acquire two votes & in many cases even three. The majority of skilled workmen possess an income of over £80 & a considerable number dispose of one exceeding £110.⁸⁶

The 1st general election will certainly be awaited with keen interest, not to say anxiety, on the part of the upper classes who dread the tide of Socialism in Saxony, which they seem powerless to stem.

Notwithstanding the provisions of the Bill above mentioned which will apparently facilitate their election to the Landtag the Socialist community is by no means satisfied. They demand nothing less than universal suffrage and vote by ballot [i.e., equally weighted ballots], as for elections to the Reichstag.

Four large meetings were held in different parts of Dresden after the substance of the Bill appeared in the Press⁸⁷ & great disorder prevailed. A crowd of some 8000 collected towards nightfall & attempts were made to rush the guard & gain access to the [royal] Palace. The Police, however, ~~used their swords freely~~ took vigorous action & from 20 to 30 arrests were made. Further disturbances took place yesterday evening and attempts were again made to enter the Palace, but were frustrated.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/56.

86 These income figures in pounds Sterling correspond (according to Findlay's report dated December 8, 1908) to an annual income of 1,600 marks and 2,200 marks – thresholds in the final bill for receiving extra ballots.

87 The general terms of the final agreement were first reported in the press on January 9, 1909.

**Honorary Consul E.C. Trench to Sir Edward Grey, Dresden, No. 7
(January 28, 1909)**

The end of Saxony's six-year suffrage reform drama has been anticlimactic. The Saxon government, Trench concludes, has conceded more than the "parties of order" in the Landtag.

With reference to my despatch No. 6 Confidential of the 19th instant, containing a brief sketch of the more important provisions of the new Franchise Reform Bill, I have the honour to report that the new measure was passed unanimously by the 1st Chamber on the 20th instant.

The proceedings were brief. The sitting was opened by Dr. [Adolf] Wach who was mainly responsible for the drawing up of the present Bill, and in a masterly speech he touched on the various proposals examined by the deputation constituted for the purpose of discovering a satisfactory solution, and whose labours resulted in the present measure based on the Plural System.

He was followed by Count Hohenthal who enumerated the difficulties which the Government had had to contend with in their desire to satisfy the reasonable demands of the Second Chamber.

It was with reluctance, he said[,] that the Government had had to abandon their proposals based on proportional representation, but rather than provoke a conflict between the Government and the Chamber, the Bill had been framed on its present lines; they had, in fact, made the best of a bad job.

The Bill was passed by the Chamber of Deputies two days later by a majority of 72 votes to 5.⁸⁸

The first General election under the new system will take place in September [*sic* for October–November 1909].

The Landtag was closed on the 26th instant by His Majesty the King in a speech from the Throne in which the Sovereign congratulated the Chambers on the successful termination of an arduous session.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/56 (draft); FO 371/671 (final), BFO-CP, reel 23, no. 2326.

**Arthur C. Grant Duff to Sir Edward Grey, No. 4, Dresden
(February 15, 1912)**

The new plural suffrage bill finally became law on May 5, 1909. This despatch from the later British envoy in Dresden, A.C. Grant Duff (1912),

88 *Landtagsakten. Verhandlungen des ordentlichen/außerordentlichen Landtags des Königreichs Sachsen* 1907/08, Ständische Schriften, Nr. 107, §22 (January 25, 1909).

*is included here because it includes an English translation of the law. The law consists of forty-three paragraphs, but a brief excerpt provides its key elements, as the London Foreign Office noted: Paragraph 11 was the most important one, defining how extra ballots were to be ascribed on the basis of property, income, occupation, and education.*⁸⁹

Electoral Law of May 5, 1909.

Article 1

PARAGRAPH 1

The 68th paragraph of the Constitutional Charter shall be amended as follows.

The Second Chamber (Chamber of Deputies) of the Assembly of Estates shall consist of ninety [*sic*] one members. Of these 43 members shall be elected by urban electoral districts and 48 by rural electoral districts....

Article II

GENERAL PROVISIONS ...

PARAGRAPH 9

Every male Saxon is entitled to vote provided he pays a direct state tax in the Kingdom of Saxony, has completed his twenty fifth year when the electoral register is closed, has been a Saxon subject for two years, and has resided for at least six months in the locality in which the electoral register is drawn up.

PARAGRAPH 10

The following persons are not entitled to vote:

- a. Persons under guardianship.
- b. Undischarged bankrupts.
- c. Persons who have been deprived of their civil rights or who are incapacitated from holding public office by judicial sentence, for the period during which such deprivation is valid.

89 *Wahlgesetz für die Zweite Kammer der Stände-Versammlung vom 5. Mai 1909*. For an excerpt in English, see the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*, [appendix 1](#). Two Foreign Office minutes attached to Grant Duff's report express contrasting reactions. G.H. Villiers writes, "It was hardly necessary to send us the law in extenso. A short summary would have been more useful. Paragraph 11 is really the only one of interest to us." Eyre Crowe writes, "The report may interest the Prime Minister. Send it to his private secretary."

- d. Persons under examination or on trial on a charge of felony or misdemeanor when conviction may entail loss of civil rights or incapacity to fill a public office and persons who at the time of the election are undergoing imprisonment or penal servitude.
- e. Persons under police supervision.
- f. Persons whose direct or communal taxes at the time when the register is closed are more than twelve months in arrears.
- g. Persons who are in receipt of public relief or who have been relieved during the year preceding the election....

PARAGRAPH 11

Every qualified elector has a single vote, in so far as he is not entitled to more than one vote in accordance with the provisions given below.

A. The following are entitled to two votes:

- a) Persons who have an income exceeding 1600 Mark.
- b) Persons who draw a salary exceeding 1400 Mark from a public office or from a permanent private situation.
- c) Persons entitled to vote at the election of members of the Chamber of Industry or the "Landeskulturrat" and who earn an income exceeding 1400 Mark through their calling.
- d) Persons who at the moment when the register is closed own or occupy real property in the Kingdom of Saxony charged with not less than 100 fiscal units, provided that the total income of the elector exceeds 1250 Mark.
- e) Persons who at the moment when the register is closed own or occupy real estate in the Kingdom of Saxony, of which an area exceeding two hectares is under cultivation, forestry or fruit culture or an area exceeding half a hectare is used for horticulture or vine growing.
- f) Persons who can prove that they have had a scientific training by means of certificates entitling the holder to military service for one year only.

B. The following have three votes:

- a) Persons who have an income exceeding 2200 Mark.
- b) Persons who (see A.b. above) draw a public or private salary exceeding 1900 Mark.
- c) Persons who not being in public or private service draw an income exceeding 1900 Mark from one of the liberal professions (lawyers, physicians, professors, engineers, artists[, authors &c.).
- d) Persons who own or occupy real property (see A.d. above) of which an area exceeding 4 hectares is employed for agriculture, forestry

or fruit culture or an area exceeding one hectare is employed for horticulture or vine growing.

C. The following have four votes:

- a) Persons who have an income exceeding 2800 Mark.
- b) Persons who draw a public or private salary exceeding 2500 Mark.
- c) Persons owning or occupying real property charged with not less than 200 fiscal units provided that the total income of the elector exceeds 2200 Mark.
- d) Persons who own or occupy real property of which an area exceeding eight hectares is employed for agriculture, forestry or fruit culture or an area exceeding two hectares is employed for horticulture or for vine growing.

A person who has completed his fiftieth year at the moment when the register is closed is entitled to an additional vote (Age Vote) provided always that no person shall be entitled to more than four votes.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/60 (draft); FO 371/374 (final), BFO-CP, reel 39, no. 7197.

**Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay to Sir Edward Grey, No. 12
Confidential, Dresden (February 17, 1909)**

When Count Wilhelm von Hohenthal und Bergen took over his post as Saxon government leader in May 1906 – after having served for decades as Saxony’s envoy to Prussia – he explicitly stated that his only important task was to see Landtag suffrage reform through to a successful conclusion. As Findlay explains here, he did so while suffering severe health problems. Hohenthal acceded to the wish of the non-socialist parties in the Landtag to devise a new suffrage that would disadvantage “the reds.” Yet the envoy gives him high marks for “plucky” statesmanship and a worldly political outlook, ignoring Hohenthal’s willingness to endorse the undemocratic features of the new law.

I deeply regret to report that Count Hohenthal, Saxon Minister for Foreign Affairs and for the Interior, is very seriously ill, and that even if he recovers, which I understand is considered very doubtful by some of his medical advisers, it appears most improbable that he will be able to resume his duties as Minister.⁹⁰

90 Hohenthal formally resigned on July 1, 1909, and died on September 29, 1909.

Count Hohenthal is suffering from heart complaint complicated by a serious affection of the kidneys. There are other complications, I believe, and the plucky manner in which His Excellency stuck to his part when scarcely able to stand for more than a few minutes in order to carry through the reform of the Saxon franchise with which he had been entrusted, undoubtedly exercised a prejudicial effect on his health.

...

He is one of the very few Saxons who are in touch with the political world outside Saxony, and though as a rule he was unwilling to discuss Imperial foreign policy, for which he was not responsible, still there were occasions when he spoke out, and from his long experience of Berlin as Saxon representative in the Bundesrat, he spoke with a certain authority.

I regret Count Hohenthal's probable disappearance from public life and more that he was a man of moderate views, who evidently regretted the strained relations which had grown up between Germany and the United Kingdom. Though not unaffected by the suspicion of British policy which has been so general in Germany of late, he was always ready to listen to reason and to welcome any arguments which I from time to time ventured to submit in explanation of the attitude of His Majesty's Government.

Source: Foreign Office, FO 371/672; BFO-CF, reel 24, no. 7079.

**Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnell Findlay to Sir Edward Grey, No. 22
Confidential, Dresden (April 14, 1909)**

*Count Hohenthal will resign as Saxon government leader on July 1, 1909, and his successor, Count Vitzthum, has been designated. Attached to this report was one of Eyre Crowe's most caustic minutes, viz. "The Vitzthum family are noted for lack of brains."*⁹¹

Count Hohenthal's health has, contrary to the expectation of his medical advisers, somewhat improved, but is still so precarious that he has been forced to abandon the hope of again taking an active part in political life.

...

I am informed that Count Hohenthal will be succeeded as Minister of Interior and for Foreign Affairs by Count [Christoph] Vitzthum von Eckstädt, at present Saxon Envoy in Berlin, who in his turn will be succeeded by Freiherr Ernst von Salza und Lichtenau who is at

⁹¹ Minute of April 19, 1909.

present head of the Amtshauptmannschaft [administrative district] of Dresden-Neustadt.

...

I have only a slight acquaintance with Count Hohenthal's successor, Count Vitzthum. He is rather an unknown quantity in Saxony, and I gather that his intellectual capacity is not gauged very high.

...

The recent changes in the Saxon service illustrate the influence possessed by a few leading families which form the counterpart in Saxony of the old whig connection.

Thus, Count Hohenthal, whose wife is a Vitzthum, is succeeded by a Vitzthum, who in turn is succeeded by a Freiherr von Salza, whose wife is a Vitzthum.

Source: Foreign Office, FO 371/672; BFO-CF, reel 24, no. 7079.

The British envoy Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay left his post in Dresden in June 1909. His successor, A.C. Grant Duff, only took up his duties near the end of November 1909.⁹² In the meantime, the Social Democrats held their annual congress in September 1909, in Saxony's second-largest city, Leipzig. Here, Count John de Salis – chargé d'affaires and councillor of embassy in Berlin – provides the Foreign Office with a report on the congress.

Count John de Salis⁹³ to Sir Edward Grey, No. 333, Berlin (September 24, 1909)

De Salis looks back on the party's fortunes since its "Dreimillionensieg" (three million victory) in the Reichstag elections of 1903 – when it won

92 Sir Arthur Cuninghame Grant Duff (1861–1948) was educated at Balliol College, Oxford, and entered Britain's diplomatic service in 1865. After serving in Madrid, Vienna, and Stockholm, he returned to the London Foreign Office in 1897; but after three years he was again on the move (to Caracas, Berne, Mexico, and Brussels, then Darmstadt, Karlsruhe, and Havana). In June 1909 he was appointed minister resident to Saxony and Saxe-Coburg and Gotha and chargé d'affaires to Waldeck-Pyrmont. At the outbreak of the First World War he returned to London, where he worked in Admiralty Intelligence until 1919.

93 John Francis Charles, 7th Count de Salis-Soglio (1864–1939), served in Berlin as chargé d'affaires and counsellor of embassy from 1906 to 1911. He was educated at Eton and entered the British diplomatic service in 1886. His postings included Brussels, Madrid, Cairo, and Athens, and he served in London's Foreign Office from 1901 to 1906 before arriving in Berlin. He was the owner of two large landed estates in Ireland.

more than three million votes. He also emphasizes present tensions within the party: between those he calls "Extremists" (i.e., orthodox Marxists led by August Bebel, who occupied a central position in the party), and "Revisionists" led by Eduard Bernstein. De Salis believes that no Leftist bloc "from Bassermann to Bebel" is possible, for two main reasons. First, the left-liberal parties suffer from poor leadership and opportunism. Second, the German government still regards the SPD as "being outside political life" – "a mad-dog party." De Salis also reflects on similarities and differences between English and German labour leaders.

The annual meeting of the Social-Democratic party took place during the first half of this month at Leipzig. The proceedings were interesting owing to the light thrown on them by the internal constitution of the party, while their result would appear to indicate that the representatives of extreme ideas have been gradually losing ground.

The [Reichstag] elections of 1903 resulted in a gain of twenty-five seats to the Socialist party, which returned to the Reichstag with no less than eighty-one votes [i.e., seats]. Their success may have been due in some measure to discontent produced not only among the working classes but also among the smaller functionaries and others at the failure of the Liberal parties to resist the agrarian policy of the Government as exemplified by the customs tariff voted in 1902. Encouraged by this success, the Extremists gained the upper hand at the meeting of the party at Dresden in 1903, and were able with the help of Herr [August] Bebel to pass a vote condemning the so-called "revisionist" program of Herr [Eduard] Bernstein in favour of a less uncompromising attitude towards the existing order of things. But a negative policy which excluded co-operation in steps towards any immediate improvement in the condition of the working classes seems to have produced a good deal of disgust or indifference, for at the elections of 1907 the party lost thirty-eight seats, and were consequently reduced to forty-five votes [seats] in the Reichstag. At the party meeting at Nuremberg in 1908 the Extremists were still in a majority, and passed a resolution condemning the action of the Socialists of Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden who had voted the budgets of their respective countries. Herr Bebel supported the resolution which was proposed, I think, by Herr [Paul] Singer of Berlin. On this the Southerners under Herr [Georg] von Vollmar, of the "Münchener Post," issued a declaration, admitting the right of the meeting to decide on questions relating to the Empire, but reserving their right of deciding what to do in local matters.

A fresh trial of strength took place this month at Leipzig between the opponents. A violent resolution was brought forward by Herr [Karl]

Kautsky, supported by Herr [Georg] Ledebour, condemning all cooperation with the “Liberal parties which had invariably betrayed the interests of the workers.” The resolution was declared to be passed by Herr Singer, who presided over the congress, but the beaten side claimed a fresh count on the ground of error, and succeeded in procuring the rejection of the resolution by a narrow majority. The result seems to have been partly due to a change of attitude on the part of Herr Bebel, who has been prevented by ill-health from taking an active part in affairs for some time past, but who sent a message to the effect that if the Inheritance Tax Bill proposed by Prince Bülow and Herr [Reinhold] Sydow⁹⁴ last session had come to a final reading the Socialists should have voted for it. The question was of course a hypothetical one, but the Extremists continued to maintain that their principles prevented their voting a shilling to any existing form of government; it was indifferent to them whether the method of raising it was in accordance or not with Socialist principles.

The recent course of events has not been favorable to the three Radical groups in the Reichstag. Thanks to unskilful [*sic*] tactics and want of leadership they were unable, during the recent financial reform crisis, to make their influence felt when supporting the Government or when opposing it. Under the present regime they seem to be condemned in the near future to fruitless opposition. As in 1907 they rushed inconsiderately into an alliance with the Conservatives for the barren satisfaction of ousting the centre [the Catholic Centre Party], they now seem, in their quest for allies, to meditate throwing themselves into the arms of the Socialists. The recent proceedings at Leipzig are welcomed by their press as paving the way to a union of the “entire left from [Ernst] Bassermann (leader of the National Liberals) to Bebel.” There seems little to justify such a forecast.⁹⁵ On the Socialist side, no one but Herr Bernstein has, so far as I know, openly advocated any such

94 Reinhold (after 1918 von) Sydow (1851–1943), Prussian minister of trade (1908–18) and Reich state secretary of the treasury (1908–9).

95 In the Foreign Office, CH added the minute: “They don’t seem to be making any headway.” CH was Charles Hardinge (1858–1944), 1st Baron Hardinge of Penshurst, who entered Britain’s diplomatic service in 1880. After serving in the British legations in Tehran and St. Petersburg, then as ambassador to Russia in 1904, he was promoted to the position of permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office in 1906. He was raised to the peerage in 1910 and appointed viceroy of India (1910–16), where he survived various assassination attempts by Indian nationalists. Ronald Hugh Campbell added a similar comment: “Things don’t seem to be going quite so well with the parties of the Left. Their fusion into one party is, I should think, most unlikely.” Eyre Crowe added that this was “an interesting review of the present position of the German Socialist Party.”

course. A journalist and writer, he hardly seems to command much influence when it comes to influencing the policy of the party. Herr [Albert] Südekum, a southerner, I think, genial in appearance, left me under the impression last year that though such tactics might be possible in theory, the attitude of the administration in treating them as being outside political life, a mad-dog party in fact, was a bar to any such action. Of the Extremists, Herr Ledebour, once a schoolmaster by profession, could hardly fail to be one of the first to attract attention. Small, clean-shaven and alert, singularly un-German in fact, almost an Irish type of politician, he was one of Prince Bülow's bitterest opponents. Yet, casual conversation with him, and his appreciative remarks as to the tone of moderation of English political life, hardly suggested a convinced revolutionary. In such a case one cannot help asking if behind some of the violent language there may not be a little malicious amusement at the dismay which it seems to cause in some circles of the German middle classes. Herr Singer leaves a somewhat different impression; a Jew, who might easily be mistaken from his appearance for a financier, he looks out of place in his surroundings. Yet he is at present chairman of the party, and perhaps its most influential member, though not a brilliant speaker. To many of them in fact, the remark made by a leader⁹⁶ of the English Labour Party respecting, I think, Herr Heine,⁹⁷ might be applied: "He is not making a speech; he is a professor giving a lecture; what right has he to speak for the working classes? In the House we should not listen to him."

It is not the Radicals alone who have hankered after the advantages which the occasional support of Socialist votes might confer. In 1907 some attempts at a working understanding for electoral purposes were made between the more moderate Socialists of Bavaria and some advanced members of the [C]entre party. But these proceedings called down a sharp reprimand from the Archbishop of Bamberg, who, with the support of the Archbishop of Munich, insisted that in no circumstances were Catholics justified in supporting a party whose principles were subversive of social order.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/676; *BFO-CP*, reel 28, no. 35745.

96 Probably Keir Hardie, leader of the British Labour Party after its establishment in 1906.

97 Wolfgang Heine (1861–1944), revisionist SPD Reichstag deputy for Berlin 3 (1898–1912), then Anhalt 1 (1912–18), later a member of state ministries in the Weimar Republic.

*Temporarily lacking a representative in Dresden, Britain's Foreign Office had no eyes or ears on the Saxon Landtag election campaign in the autumn of 1909. This was the first test of the new plural voting system legislated earlier that year after almost six years of political turmoil in the kingdom. For months, while the final form of the new suffrage was being debated, most participants expected that approximately fifteen Social Democrats might be elected to the reformed Landtag when the first general election was conducted under the new scheme. As shown in [tables 13](#) and [14](#), those expectations were badly off-target.*⁹⁸

Not fifteen, but rather twenty-five SPD candidates, were elected. Soon after the election, statistical analysis proved that more working-class voters than expected were entitled to cast two, three, or even four ballots for their Social Democratic candidate. In a Landtag comprising ninety-one deputies, the Conservatives and National Liberals (each with twenty-eight seats) still dominated the Landtag's lower house. The Progressives, with eight seats, were not entirely irrelevant. But Saxony's political culture entered a new era in 1909, as did the struggle that had been underway since 1870 to contain the "red threat."

The result of plural balloting can be seen in [tables 13](#) and [14](#), and its unfairness to working-class voters can be seen in the following chart. A total of 341,396 Saxon voters supported Social Democratic candidates across the kingdom's ninety-one electoral districts. But the vast majority of those voters (224,866) were entitled to only the single, basic ballot. Of those voters who supported Social Democratic candidates, fewer than 10,000 were entitled to cast four ballots: almost 80 per cent of them were entitled to only one ballot. Conversely, 105,553 Saxon voters supported candidates of the Conservative Party. But a large proportion of Conservative voters were entitled to cast four ballots. In each electoral district, the total number of ballots cast for a candidate determined the winner (by an absolute majority, if necessary with a run-off ballot). In this way, working-class Social Democrats, who tended to be, on average, the least privileged voters in the state, were severely disadvantaged.

A clear majority (53.8 per cent) of all Landtag voters in 1909 supported a Social Democratic candidate. But the overall proportion of ballots cast for the SPD was only 38.7 per cent. As a result, the Social Democratic caucus included just twenty-five members, not anywhere near a majority of the chamber. It was smaller than each of the Conservative and National Liberal caucuses.

98 For the expected number of Social Democratic ballots to be cast by different social groups, according to the number of ballots each was entitled to cast, see [figure S.11.1](#) in the Online Supplement to *Red Saxony*.

Table 13. *Landtag* Voters and Ballots Cast, Saxony, 1909

Party	Total voters (no.)	Voters with ... ballots				Total ballots (no.)
		1 (no.)	2 (no.)	3 (no.)	4 (no.)	
Conservatives	105,553	21,884	27,767	13,617	42,285	287,409
[Antisemitic] Reformers	20,249	4,176	5,102	2,762	8,209	55,502
National Liberals	125,157	26,792	32,472	18,767	47,126	336,541
[Left-Liberal] Radicals	41,857	11,909	12,289	6,319	11,340	100,804
Social Democrats	341,396	224,866	91,758	14,948	9,824	492,522
Total*	634,735	289,790	169,541	56,490	118,914	1,273,998

Source: Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 527 (and for explanatory notes).

* Total includes "other" (*zersplittert*) ballots cast.

Table 14. Proportion of *Landtag* Voters and Ballots Cast, Saxony, 1909

Party	Total voters (%)	Voters with ... ballots				Total ballots (%)	Seats won (no.)
		1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)		
Conservatives	16.6	7.6	16.4	24.1	35.6	22.6	28
[Antisemitic] Reformers	3.2	1.4	3.0	4.9	6.9	4.4	2
National Liberals	19.7	9.3	19.2	33.2	39.6	26.4	28
[Left-Liberal] Radicals	6.6	4.1	7.3	11.2	9.5	7.9	8
Social Democrats	53.8	77.6	54.1	26.5	8.3	38.7	25
Other	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	91

Source: Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 527 (and for explanatory notes).

In the Saxon Landtag election of 1909, if an equal suffrage had prevailed, as in the Reichstag, the Social Democrats would have won no fewer than eighty of ninety-one seats.⁹⁹ Was the suffrage reform of 1909 really a step forward toward a more democratic voting system? If so, it was a baby step. The intention of the Saxon government and the non-socialist parties in 1909 was not very different from their motives in introducing three-class voting in 1896: in both cases, they intended to prevent "the reds" from "conquering" Saxony's state parliament, and in both cases they succeeded.

99 As first noted in Ritter, *Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch*, 180.

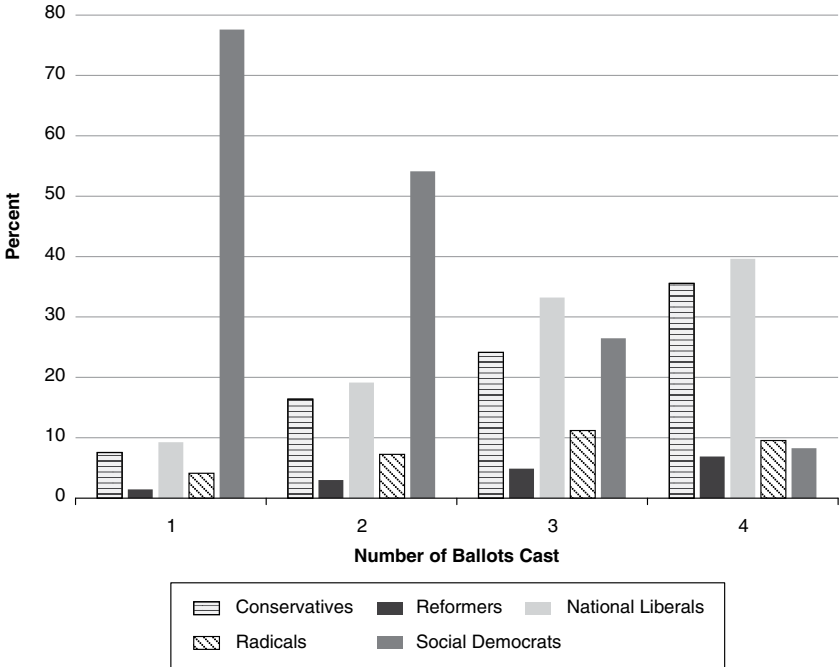


Figure 28. Proportion of *Landtag* voters and ballots cast, Saxony, 1909

Source: Drawn by the author.

Note: This chart shows some of the same information as tables 13 and 14. *Reading examples:* 77.6 per cent of all Social Democratic voters were entitled to cast only one ballot. Of all National Liberal voters, 39.6 per cent were entitled to cast four ballots.

British observers in Dresden had reacted with mixed sentiments to the suffrage reform when it was passed in January 1909. They were concerned, as they had been in 1868, that a Saxon suffrage reform should not send the state headlong toward universal suffrage. In his report of January 19, 1909, E.C. Trench noted that plural voting would “enable a large proportion of the working classes to acquire two votes, and in many cases even three.” The property qualification for extra ballots had been “fixed very low.” But Findlay wrote on January 14 that the new suffrage would “by no means satisfy the aspirations of the bulk of the working class.” Hence popular unrest might continue – something the British never wanted to witness across the North Sea. In London’s Foreign Office, a minute attached to these reports sounded distinctly unhappy. Far

*from seeing a “considerable advance in a democratic sense,” one writer observed, “The Conservatives have done all they could to hinder any serious reform of the franchise.” Another wondered how the new system could possibly work; he exclaimed, “Extra votes for education will necessitate an exam!”*¹⁰⁰

100 See Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay to Sir Edward Grey, Dresden (January 14, 1909), and E.C. Trench’s report dated January 19, 1909, above, plus the minutes of January 25, 1909, attached to their reports. The National Archives, FO 371/671, BFO-CP, reel 23, no. 2326.

PART V

1910–1914

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From 1910 onward, the attention of British envoys in each federal capital of Germany was drawn to the issue of Social Democracy's growth, and its repression, almost exclusively in the context of the struggle to reform Prussia's three-class suffrage, which dated from 1854. In May 1910, Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg's failure to find a way around the resistance of Conservatives in the Prussian Landtag – and, to a lesser extent, the resistance of National Liberals and Centre Party members too – left in place the symbolic keystone of Prussian reaction and the single greatest impediment to democratic reform in the empire as a whole.¹ Meanwhile, in the years 1910–14, Saxon politics became more quiescent.

Even after the Reichstag elections of January 1912, when Social Democrats staged a comeback in both Saxony and the Reich after their disastrous showing in 1907, British envoys rarely commented on Social Democracy in its own right. They focused instead on the British-German naval race (especially the German Empire's ability to sustain it financially), the Balkan Wars, the Kaiser's unpredictable statements and actions, the propaganda of radical nationalist groups like the Pan-German League, the Navy League, and the Army League, and the possibility of a major international conflict.

The British ambassador to Germany, Sir Edward Goschen, despite his German heritage, sometimes misread the tenor of German political life. He wrote that the election campaign leading to the Reichstag elections of January 1912 – the most hard-fought campaign in the history of Imperial Germany, and one that overturned the verdict of 1907 – “has not produced anything of very general interest.”² (See [table 15](#),

1 Reform of Prussia's three-class suffrage first caught the sustained attention of London's Foreign Office in 1907–8. From Berlin, Munich, and elsewhere, British envoys kept London well-informed about the issues under debate in the Prussian House of Deputies and violence on the streets of Berlin. They often emphasized that this was not a purely Prussian matter. See, for example, Fairfax L. Cartwright to Sir Edward Grey, No. 72, Munich (August 5, 1907), with the attached minute by G.H. Villiers stating, “M. Cartwright in another interesting despatch traces the growth of liberal ideas in S. Germany & shows how the franchise has been reformed there: he then points to the growing demand all over the Empire that the Prussian Electoral system shall be reformed & made more liberal. This however the ‘Junkers’ will never allow, & an interesting struggle is foreshadowed if this question is really brought forward.” The National Archives, FO 371/261, BFO-CP, reel 15, no. 26391.

2 Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey, No. 1, Berlin (January 3, 1912), The National Archives, FO 371/1370; BFO-CP, reel 37, no. 1148. In his report of January 3, 1912, Goschen had reported on an inspired article in the governmental *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, wherein Chancellor Bethmann belatedly (on January 2) offered an election manifesto to rally the “state-supporting” parties of the empire. Goschen noted

where the election results of 1907 and 1912 are compared.) The muted resonance of electoral issues after 1909 for British envoys in Saxony contrasts sharply with reports from other diplomats, in an earlier age, who compiled so many compelling reports. Yet the rise of German Social Democracy and attempts to repress it did not fall completely out of view for British statesmen in London.

**Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey, No. 16, Berlin
(January 16, 1910)**

Britain's ambassador in Berlin reports on the opening salvos of the Prussian suffrage reform struggle in 1910 that ended miserably in May when the government's proposed legislation was withdrawn before a final vote. The whole affair, as London's Foreign Office glimpsed at the time, was a true debacle for Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and probably his greatest blunder in domestic politics.

On the occasion of the recent opening of the Prussian Diet, it was stated in the Speech from the Throne that the Government would, in the course of a few weeks, lay before the House a proposal for a new electoral law for Prussia.³

In view of the great political interest which attaches to the proposal for reform and of the fact that for some years past the strangely anomalous and undemocratic nature of the existing electoral law has been the vehicle for savage attacks on the Government, not only by the Socialists but also by the Radicals and Liberals, it might not be inopportune to sketch briefly the existing electoral system, which, it has been said, is one that might have been the result of an astute intrigue intended to make the German Empire the cause of continual dissatisfaction on the part of the masses of the people in Prussia with the constitution of their kingdom.

...

There is a very wide diversity of opinion as to the merits and the demerits of this system. If the same system as is in force for the election of members for the Reichstag were adopted for electing members of the Prussian Diet, the three-category Chamber system might be indefinitely

later in his report, "I have again seen some signs of an expectation of great gains on the part of the Social-Democrats and the Left." A minute attached to Goschen's report said of Bethmann's article, "It is simply a manifesto against the Social Democrats."

3 Eyre Crowe's minute (January 26, 1910) reads, "A reform of the present Prussian law has been promised. But as in the case of the promised law for introducing universal franchise in Hungary, there is a general expectation that the new law will so manipulate either the votes or the electoral districts, as to assure a continuance of the ruling minority in power."

prolonged [i.e., left unreformed], for the Constitution offers no means by which the third category can outvote the other two categories, nor is there any lawful means of revolutionizing the existing system so long as the first and second categories advocate its maintenance.

But, as has been often pointed out, every Prussian is also a German, and as such enjoys the right to vote directly by ballot for the candidate of his choice to represent him in the Reichstag. Thus there are numberless Prussians who, in their capacity as Germans, take part in the elections for the Imperial Diet, but find themselves excluded from participation in the elections for the Prussian Diet.

This strange method of working two diametrically-opposed systems side by side has, somewhat naturally, been productive of much discontent and in an incessant and powerful propaganda of democracy, if not of Socialism, amongst the unfranchised Prussians, who protest that whereas one system educates them to regard every man as a citizen and voter, the other claims that votes ought to be distributed in proportion to wealth, and that although they are men and voters in the German Empire, they are impotent in all that concerns Prussia.

The strangeness of this anomaly becomes more apparent when it is observed that a given party may prove in the eyes of the Empire by the elections for the Reichstag that it is particularly strong in a given district, and even secures it a decided majority there, and yet in the elections for the Prussian Diet in the same district it may find itself not represented by a single candidate. The party which suffers most under this condition of things is one of the strongest in Prussia, viz., the Social Democrats, who argue that they are forced to feel that while Germany is their Fatherland, Prussia for them merely plays the rôle of stepmother. In the elections for the Reichstag this party pulls an immense number of votes, and yet is never represented by as many members in proportion to the number of votes as the other parties. In the Prussian Diet, however, the Social Democrats are practically unrepresented, their electors being for the greater part members of the third category, which is powerless to assert itself.... The Social Democrats clamor that universal suffrage be granted to the electors for the Prussian Diet, while the Liberals demand reform without specifying the form they desire it should take. It is hardly probable that the dreams of the Social Democrats will ever be realized, because the three-category system assures their impotence in the Prussian elections, and everything points to the likelihood that the Prussian Conservatives, in dealing with the problem of reform, will not allow themselves to be induced to abandon the impregnable position which they occupy at present.

Arthur C. Grant Duff to Sir Edward Grey, No. 13, Dresden
(February 13, 1910)

Britain's envoy to Saxony reports the views of the Conservative press in Dresden and the National Liberal press in Leipzig. Both are reacting to the same speech by Bethmann Hollweg that Sir Edward Goschen reported on from Berlin. Eyre Crowe notes in a minute to Grant Duff's report that the bill is unpopular throughout Germany, and the Saxon press is, for the most part, unfavourably disposed too.

The [Conservative] "Dresdener Nachrichten" is of [the] opinion that "the speech has strengthened the new Imperial Chancellor's reputation as a statesman who has received a thorough training in history and philosophy: and has thrown a strong light on the profound intellectual and ethical individuality displayed by him in dealing with political problems."⁴ ... The newspaper in question continues ..., "It is unthinkable that an Imperial Chancellor of this type could in his capacity of Prussian Prime Minister give his approval to a franchise law which was likely to loosen in the slightest degree the framework of the Prussian State...."

The [National Liberal] "Leipziger Tageblatt" declares that a distinction must be made between electoral reform in Prussia and the new franchise bill, the former being a matter of the highest political necessity, while the latter only springs from the desire of the Government to extricate themselves from a disagreeable situation rising out of the promises made to the Liberals by Prince Bülow at the time of the formation of the block [1907]....

[The *Leipziger Tageblatt* continues:] "The King's promise had to be redeemed and yet remain unredeemed. Something had to be done and yet remain undone. Public opinion required satisfaction as a matter of form, without any essential change. The existing franchise law is excellent, still it is not without defects which can be easily removed. The bill removing these defects has now appeared. It is none the worse for being artificial and difficult of comprehension. The uninitiated cannot easily discover its

4 It seems not to have occurred to Grant Duff that these opening phrases in a hard-line Conservative editorial were ironic: they bestowed faint praise on a politician the Conservatives already distrusted. The Conservative Party's leader in Prussia, Ernst von Heydebrand und der Lasa, who led the fight against Prussian suffrage reform in 1910, made the point five years earlier (at the time of Bethmann's initial appointment to the Prussian state ministry): "As minister of the interior," wrote Heydebrand, "we need a man with a strong hand and backbone. A man like Fritz and Botho Eulenburg, [Robert von] Puttkamer, [Ernst von] Köller. Instead you give us a philosopher." Cited in Bernhard von Bülow, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, 4 vols. (Berlin, 1930-1), 2:181.

true character. This is quite in accordance with the views of Prince Bülow who on occasions considered it advisable to complicate the situation as far as possible because he knew that Germans have a modest opinion of their political capacity and they are not inclined to cut the Gordian knot as tied by the Bureaucracy with the sword of sound common sense. The Government has done its duty: it cannot be denied that the King's promise has been redeemed. If Parliament makes demands which cannot be met, the Government will be released from all responsibility.... Unless the present signs are deceptive, Parliament will insist on the ballet. The Prime Minister has however declared that the ballet is unacceptable on ethical grounds and that his personal conviction is against it. The bill will be allowed to drop as it is equally distasteful to the Prussian Government, to the Conservatives and to the Centre."

...

I have not examined any of the Socialist newspapers published in this Kingdom, as the attitude of the Press of that Party is sufficiently apparent from the various articles appearing in the "Vorwärts" [*sic*] which condemns the Franchise Bill root and branch. The "Dresdener Nachrichten" however observes that Mr. Leo Arons⁵ a well known member of the Socialist party, has advised his friends to accept the measure provided a compromise is reached securing amendments favourable to Social Democracy. The bill is therefore for the Socialists hardly the "monstrous measure for depriving the people of their rights" which it is asserted to be.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/903; BFO-CP, reel 30, no. 2535.

Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey, No. 37, Berlin (February 15, 1910)

From Berlin Goschen reports on the tumultuous session of the Prussian Landtag on February 10. As Prussian Minister President Bethmann Holweg outlined his suffrage reform proposal, the Socialist benches erupted with cries of "Pfui!" – "an expression used by Germans to imply extreme disgust and contempt." This scene produced "profound astonishment followed by a storm of indignant protest." The ambassador expresses little

⁵ Martin Leo Arons (1860–1919) came from an affluent Jewish banking family in Berlin (see also the earlier note on him as an unsalaried lecturer). He was a Social Democratic organizer and expert on the Prussian three-class suffrage. He sympathized with the revisionist wing of the SPD.



Figure 29. Berlin police prepare for a suffrage demonstration, February 13, 1910. Demonstrators turned out in the thousands.

Source: Ilse Fischer and Werner Krause, *August Bebel 1840–1913* (Cologne, 1988), 135.

sympathy for the Socialists and praises Bethmann Hollweg for continuing his speech, “with dignity and effect.” Goschen also describes press reactions to the speech as well as the mass demonstrations in favour of suffrage reform held on Sunday, February 13, in Berlin and Frankfurt am Main.

On the 10th instant the Imperial chancellor ... laid before the Prussian Diet a bill embodying the Government proposals for reform of the Prussian Franchise.⁶

6 G.H. Villiers’s Foreign Office minute notes, “The 3rd [sic] class system of voting condemned by Bismarck as a very bad system, remains as also does the open ballot, but it is possible that further modifications may be introduced as a result of discussion in Committee.” Signalling his own uncertainty on the matter, Villiers adds, “Sir E. Goschen considers that the Chancellor has enhanced his reputation by his speech.” Eyre Crowe writes, “The committee of the diet is apparently making short work of the most objectionable parts of the bill. It would be a pity if the position of Herr von Bethmann-

On rising to introduce the bill Herr von Bethmann was greeted with the cry of “Pfui!” from Socialist benches, an expression used by Germans to imply extreme disgust and contempt. The effect produced by this outburst was one of profound astonishment followed by a storm of indignant protest. The scene which ensued was one of almost unprecedented violence in the annals of the Prussian Parliament, and the President [of the chamber] had great difficulty in restoring order. When Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg finally obtained a hearing he spoke for over an hour, amidst continual interruptions on the part of the Socialists, at which he displayed some irritation. He stated that it was the intention of the Government that the franchise should develop on the basis of the Constitution. The government, he said, in bringing forward the proposals were not actuated by the desire to favor any particular party. The Socialists [continued Bethmann] censured the existing system because it checked their ambitions towards power, which if they acquired they would use to overthrow the present régime. They claimed that the reins of Government should be handed over to the masses, but, he continued, he was convinced that though mere numbers were perhaps more convenient they were not the only standard for the vital power of the people. The question of electoral reform had assumed an importance which it hardly merited in that it was used by the Socialists as the vehicle for attack on the Government and for general political agitation.

The Chancellor then referred to the recent elections in England which, he said, had awakened unprecedented passion in the breasts of Englishmen; but, he continued, centuries of political education restrained the English from carrying political or religious differences into the personal and social domain. One Englishman did not estimate the value of another by the fact that the latter’s political views differed from his own. Germans had, unfortunately, not arrived at this point. They held a man to be on a lower level than themselves if he did not see eye to eye with them, and this was, to a great extent, responsible for the fact that political conditions in Germany were often characterized by feelings of bitterness which wounded more deeply than the realities of political antagonism. In conclusion Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg spoke in defence of the existing political régime in Prussia ... which the Socialists desired to abolish. The development of democracy in Parliament would demoralize the political sense of the nation, and the government was only doing its duty when,

Hollweg were to be seriously imperilled [*sic*] by the line he has taken in the Prussian franchise question.” Another minute reads, “That alone matters as far as we are concerned,” and permanent undersecretary Charles Hardinge observes, “The Chancellor’s position depends largely on the Emperor & on the difficulty of finding a successor.”

while obviating what was antiquated, it pursued the policy and upheld the régime under which Prussia had become great.

The speech was received with applause on the part of the whole house, with the exception of the small Socialist band⁷ who expressed their feelings with loud hisses.

...

Neither the bill nor the Chancellor's speech have produced a favorable effect on the press. Both Conservatives and Radicals asked why the government thought it necessary to introduce a bill for reform at all when they are determined not to be influenced by public opinion and are convinced of the benefits conferred by the old system. The Chancellor's speech, they contend, was academic, bureaucratic and abstruse, and showed a complete lack of comprehension of the elements of political life.

The headquarters of the Socialist Party organized 43 meetings of protest against the bill, which were held on Sunday last, the 13th instant, in Berlin and its suburbs. The anxiety which was felt by the authorities with regard to these meetings may be judged from the fact that the following proclamation was placarded throughout the town in evident anticipation of serious disturbances:-⁸

"The streets are solely for purposes of traffic. Opposition to the executive power will be met with the use of weapons. I hereby warn would be on-lookers.⁹ Berlin, February 13, 1910. Signed: v. Jagow, President of Police."

[*Goschen's report continues:*] Extensive precautions were taken to meet any contingency, every available policeman was on duty and the Berlin garrison was confined to barracks, the guard at the Royal Palace was doubled and a cordon of police barred all the streets in its vicinity.

The day passed off, however, without serious disorder. Peaceful socialist demonstrations were held in various parts of the town where special police precautions had not been taken, and only one conflict took place

7 After the Prussian *Landtag* elections of autumn 1908, seven Social Democrats sat in the house, elected by 598,522 votes; by contrast, 152 representatives of the German Conservative Party had been elected by 354,786 votes. Warneken, ed., *Als die Deutschen demonstrieren lernten*, 10.

8 Goschen omits the opening phrase of Jagow's declaration, which cited SPD propaganda: "The 'right to the streets' has been proclaimed."

9 Berlin Police President Traugott von Jagow (1865–1941, served 1909–16) was subsequently ridiculed for using the curt phrase "*Ich warne Neugierige*," which Goschen might have translated as "I warn the curious."

at the Crown Prince Bridge; no serious injury however was inflicted, and Berlin has now resumed its normal appearance and considers that the danger is past.

After a debate of three days the Bill was referred to a Committee, where it is now being discussed.

With regard to the Chancellor's speech itself there would seem to be the greatest divergence of opinion in the Berlin press. Praised to the skies by certain Conservative journals, by others it has been severely criticized; while in the Radical and Socialistic papers it is subjected to censure of various degrees of violence. The [liberal] "Vossische Zeitung", the [Free Conservative] "Post" and the [agrarian-Conservative] "[Deutsche] Tageszeitung" regard it as the Chancellor's best effort and declare it to be one of the finest speeches ever delivered from the Ministerial Bench of the Prussian House of Representatives. On the other hand the [left-liberal] "Berliner Tageblatt", the [Social Democratic] "Vorwärts" and the entire Socialistic Press see nothing in the speech but fine words and phrases, which, if they meant anything at all, meant that he was an opponent rather than an advocate of the measure he was introducing. The Bill is in fact a bitter disappointment to them and they consider that not only has the Chancellor destroyed all their hopes of a serious measure of electoral reform, but that he has also, by certain ill-considered phrases, increased the already strong anti-Prussian sentiments existing in the rest of the Empire. He is twitted with having become a frank reactionary and sarcastic allusions are made to the faithful henchman of Prince Bülow having thrown in his lot with the very party [the German Conservative Party] who were responsible for the overthrow of that statesman.

The criticism that he did not show himself in the light of a zealous advocate of the measure he was introducing is not without foundation; but on the whole it may be said that by his speech the Chancellor has increased his reputation. He was greatly interrupted and hooted at by the Socialists, but he showed considerable determination and, especially towards the close of his speech, spoke with dignity and effect.

Since writing the above I learn that at the conclusion of five Socialist meetings convoked at Frankfort for the purpose of protesting against the action of the police on Sunday last, a conflict involving bloodshed took place, between the police and the demonstrators. No definite news as to the outcome of the encounter has yet been received, but it is known that in quelling the disturbance the police had recourse to their revolvers and several of the demonstrators were severely injured.

Arthur C. Grant Duff to Sir Edward Grey, No. 15, Dresden (February 20, 1910)

One of the principal issues that Saxon parliamentarians took up in 1910 – in the face of consistent opposition from the government and the Conservatives – was the movement for reform of the Saxon upper house (“Erste Kammer”), whose members were mainly unelected. This campaign was led by National Liberals and Progressives in the lower house, who argued (correctly) that industrial and commercial interests were seriously under-represented in Saxony’s equivalent of the British House of Lords.¹⁰ But the “Erste Kammer” was not reformed at all before the November Revolution of 1918.

I have the honour to report that an interesting debate took place on the 17th instant in the Lower House of the Saxon Diet with regard to certain motions affecting the composition and the actual existence of the Upper House.

As you are aware the Upper House consists of the Princes of the Royal Family who are of full age, of the “Lord of Estates” i.e. the members of the mediatized families established in Saxony and recognized by the Saxon Government, of representatives elected by landowners, of landowners appointed by the Crown and of five other members also appointed by the Crown, of the representative of the University of Leipzig, of representatives of religious foundations, and of official representatives of eight cities.

The motions were brought forward by the members of three different parties viz: the Radical, the National-Liberal and the Social-Democratic groups. The first two were in favour of reforming the Upper House while the Socialists brought in a motion for its abolition. The Radical motion was introduced by Mr. Günther¹¹ who said that his party desired a return to the system instituted by the Law of November 15th 1848 according to which the Upper House was to consist of the Princes of the Royal House, of full age, and of fifty other members elected by the people, but that failing this he and his friends wished the Upper House to be composed of representatives of the larger Professional Groups elected proportionally to their numbers....

The National Liberal motion which was brought forward by Mr. Hettner¹² was in favour of strengthening the Upper House by the

10 Unidentified Foreign Office minute attached to report: “A curious resemblance to the situation here.”

11 Oskar Günther (1861–1945), a businessman from Plauen and leader of the left-liberal State Association of the Progressive People’s Party in Saxony. Günther was a member of the Saxon *Landtag* (1903–18) and of the Reichstag (1907–12).

12 Franz Hettner (1863–1946), privy judicial councillor and district court director in Dresden. From 1909 to 1918 Hettner chaired the National Liberal state association

addition of representatives of industry, trade, manufactures, jurisprudence, public instruction, and medical and technical science, as expert advisers of the administration rather than as delegates of particular groups or classes.... He declared himself opposed to all attempts to abolish the Upper House.

The social democratic view of the question was explained by Mr. Fleissner¹³ who introduced a motion for the abolition of the Upper House, as being an institution to which his party was entirely opposed. The existing Upper House was he said medieval in composition and a hindrance to all progressive legislation. He and his friends wished to see the present Saxon Parliament replaced by a single elective popular chamber. The Social democratic party intended to miss no opportunity of letting the masses know that the existence of an Upper House was entirely inconsistent with the interests of the democracy and the dictates of common sense.

Count Vitzthum von Eckstädt, the Minister of the Interior, reminded the House that the Government had introduced a measure of reform of the Upper Chamber in 1905 by the addition of six members, five of whom were to be representatives of Commerce, Industry and Manufactures and that the bill had been rejected by the Lower House....

The Government, Count Vitzthum continued, was not prepared at this stage to take up a position with regard to either of the motions in question....

[He also] said that he would not deal with the Social Democratic motion as it was of course irreconcilably opposed to the existing constitution....

After further speeches ..., Mr Brodauf,¹⁴ a Radical member declared that he considered that no reform of the Upper House would be acceptable which did not provide for the introduction of representatives of labour as a *sine qua non*, and regretted that the National Liberals had not joined the Radicals in insisting on this.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/904; *BFO-CP*, reel 31, no. 7848.

in Saxony and was a municipal assemblyman in Dresden. He sat in the lower house of the *Landtag* from 1907 to 1918.

13 Hermann Fleißner (1865–1939), a Social Democratic journalist in Dresden and editor of the *Dresdner Volkszeitung*. He had only entered the *Landtag* in 1909. But in 1905 he had been one of six Social Democrats who, for the first time, won election to Dresden's municipal assembly.

14 Alfred Brodauf (1871–1946), a circuit court judge in Chemnitz since 1903, was an executive member of the State Association of the Radical People's Party in Saxony; he had first been elected to the Saxon *Landtag* in 1909.



Figure 30. Undercover agents of the Berlin police, 1913. This photograph shows Berlin plainclothesmen disguised as vagabonds, hoodlums, and even women (*front row seated, third from left and fourth from right*). Such disguises were used to infiltrate not only criminal gangs but also local chapters of the Social Democratic Party.*

Source: bpk Bildagentur / Art Resource, NY.

* See the illuminating source collection of police reports edited by Richard J. Evans, *Kneipengespräche im Kaiserreich* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1989). English readers are directed to Evans, "Proletarian Mentalities: Pub Conversations in Hamburg," ch. 6 in Evans, *Proletarians and Politics* (New York, 1990), 124–91.

Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey, No. 60, Berlin (March 7, 1910)

*Ambassador Goschen describes the latest violence in Berlin's streets in favour of Prussian suffrage reform, on Sunday, March 6, as well as the mutual recriminations that appeared in the press.*¹⁵

¹⁵ G.H. Villiers's minute (March 14) on this report expresses little sympathy for either side: "The complete failure of Prince Bülow's bloc has thrown the Liberals more towards the side of the Socialists – or at any rate for the time being. It is difficult to see in what way the question of suffrage reform is likely to be seriously advanced by this 'walk' having taken place." Another unidentified minute adds, "If there were really 150 to 200,000 people present it would be a formidable demonstration in favour of a reform of the franchise."

Further serious demonstrations in favor of universal suffrage for Prussia took place in Berlin yesterday. Some days ago the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party issued invitations to all interested in the question of franchise reform to “take a walk” in the public park at Treptow, a suburb on the South East of Berlin. Their action brought them into collision with the Police Authorities, who pointed out that the gathering of a large number of people in one spot constituted a danger in itself, and announced that on Sunday the park would be closed to the public and that all access to it would be prohibited, if necessary, by force of arms.

The matter gave rise to much discussion in all sections of the press. The Conservative papers approved the attitude adopted by the Police authorities, and the Liberal organs argued that the action of the Police was provocative and that it would be more expedient to allow the “walk” [*Spaziergang*] to take place, while the Socialist papers denied that the Police had any right to interfere and clamored against Police persecution in general.

In spite of the attitude of the authorities the Socialist Executive Committee announced in the columns of the central organ, the “Vorwärts”, that the “walk” would take place, without, however, specifying its venue. But up to the last moment the Authorities were under the impression that the demonstration would be held at Treptow, and the park was occupied by a strong force of police, armed with swords and revolvers, who drew a cordon round it and shut off all access to it.

Meanwhile on Saturday secret instructions had been issued to the bulk of the would be demonstrators to assemble in the Thiergarten, the large park in the centre of Berlin, and some miles from Treptow. A body of some thousands of men made a feint in the neighborhood of the Treptow park and kept the large police force stationed there occupied the greater part of the day, while the Thiergarten, the Siegesallee and the square in front of the Reichstag, where no special precautions had been taken by the Police, were occupied by dense crowds, singing the “Labourers’ Marseillaise” and cheering for universal suffrage. The crowd was essentially peaceful and good humoured and apparently composed of men of the better working class and small bourgeoisie. A small squadron of mounted police, drafted from the force that held Unter den Linden and barred the approaches to the Palace, endeavoured for some time to clear the square in front of the Reichstag, making sudden charges and belabouring the crowd with the flat of their sabres. Their efforts were, however, fruitless, and finally at about 2.30 [p.m.] the demonstrators dispersed of their own accord, as peacefully as they had assembled.

A serious collision took place, however, later in the afternoon between the Treptow division of the demonstrators and the Police, in which the latter

are said to have had recourse to their revolvers and sabres. It is reported that some twenty people were injured and that 40 arrests were made.

As is natural the Socialist organ is triumphant over the hoodwinking of the Police and the success of the “walk”, which, it claims, is a crushing defeat for the police and which will give great impetus to the reform movement. It estimates the number of the demonstrators at from 150,000 to 200,000, which figure differs widely from the official estimate of 20,000.

The Conservative papers indignantly deny the report that the police used their revolvers and characterise Sunday’s demonstrations as illegal and disgraceful. While the Radical press cannot conceal its delight at the way in which the Police President was hoaxed, it declares that Sunday’s demonstration is the greatest coup the Socialists have as yet achieved, that the discipline of the crowd was exemplary, and that it was solely the Police who disturbed the peace and endangered the lives of women and children.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/903; BFO-CP, reel 30, no. 2535.

From March to May 1910, reports about Prussian suffrage reform – and its final failure at the end of May, with the government withdrawing its bill altogether – continued to arrive in the Foreign Office. G.H. Villiers probably expressed general opinion in London when he minuted these reports. He wrote on March 21, “The Reform scheme is little but a sham which will satisfy none but the Conservatives & Centre: no real modification of the 3 class system of voting is contemplated.” On May 9, when the fate of the government’s bill was not yet decided, he added, “A beginning, though a slight one, has been made in extending the franchise. Prussia still remains entirely un-democratic, but the agitation will go on from strength to strength and the Conservatives will have to give way. The arrogance of maintaining that Prussia can only be ‘sound’ when governed by the Ultra Conservatives would be astonishing if it were not the view held by Conservatives in every country.” Once the government’s failure was clear, Villiers concluded on May 30, “It has been an unfortunate affair for the Chancellor throughout.”

Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey, No. 224, Berlin
(August 11, 1910)

Goschen reports the content of an article in Gustav Schmoller’s Year-book, arguing for continued attempts at reform of the Prussian three-class

suffrage, and press reactions to it. According to Ambassador Goschen, Prussia's middle classes may agree that the struggle for reform must continue if revolution is to be avoided. He reminds the Foreign Office "how sensitive Prussians of the middle classes are to any imputation that they are less enlightened or modern than other peoples, and how strict their sense of duty is, when once it is pointed out to them."

With reference to my despatch No. 154 of May 27th I have the honour to inform you that the appearance of Professor [Gustav] Schmoller's *Year-book of Legislation, Administration and Political Economy*¹⁶ has roused a heated debate in newspapers of all shades of opinion on the abortive efforts of the Prussian Government to reform the electoral system of this Kingdom.¹⁷

...

In his year book he [Schmoller] attacks the Administration both for the way in which their Bill was drafted, and the grounds on which it was officially defended. He maintains that Herr von Bethmann Hollweg introduced the Bill solely in order to comply with the promise made by the Throne under different circumstances, and that his advocacy of the reform, sounded more like a defence of the old system, than a plea for the new. He warns the Chancellor that to abandon all attempts at reform after one failure is equivalent to committing political suicide, and advises him to bring in a more radical measure and force it on the Conservatives with the aid of the Liberals. A real reform bill must contain provisions for secret, direct voting.... Dr. Schmoller, who is a member of the National Liberal Party, and whose political and economic lectures are tinged with advanced views of academic socialism repeats the attacks which have been made upon the Conservative and Centre Parties for their policy of rendering services to one another at the expense of the national welfare....

These criticisms ... certainly contain nothing epoch-making, but they are accompanied by more general considerations, which gain weight

16 Gustav Schmoller, "Die Preußische Wahlrechtsreform von 1910 auf dem Hintergrunde des Kampfes zwischen Königtum und Feudalität," *Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft im Deutschen Reich* (Leipzig), Bd. 34, Heft 3 (1910): 349–67 (1261–79 of the annual volume); the article is dated June 5, 1910, soon after the reform's failure.

17 Three unidentified minutes written by British Foreign Office officials comment on this report: "It will be interesting to see if this warning 'ex cathedra' will have any effect on the Govt." "There is little chance of the Conservatives & Centre giving way, unless they are really frightened, & I do not think an academic warning of this kind will have this result, though big demonstrations may have some effect." "The question interests us on account of the effect it may have upon the Chancellor's position."

from the age and learning of the writer, and at times are couched in the language of almost tragic prophecy. The whole of the third class of electors or 82% of the voting population under the present system are rendered a negligible quantity, and Dr. Schmoller utters the warning that no monarchy is secure which is not based upon the hearts and wills of the majority of its subjects. Concessions, he insists, must be made to the democratic tendencies of the day for though the latter often overshoot the mark yet they are sound at the core. "The Prussian Class system of suffrage does not differ greatly from that which led France into the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, and resembles closely the English system, which brought about the great Reform Bills of 1832 and 1867. He who ignores this great historical and political fact is blind; and every man in a responsible position who declares the present Prussian Electoral System to be perfect and complete, incurs a share in the responsibility for the great catastrophes of the future."

The more advanced radical and socialist organs, while welcoming Professor Schmoller's utterances, declare that the nation will not be satisfied with less than those electoral rights, which they enjoy under the Imperial Constitution.... The Conservative "Kreuz-Zeitung" ... has followed its first article by violent warnings to the Liberals of the dangers they incur by pandering to Socialism, and, abandoning its usual tone of cold but correct insolence towards its opponents, has declared that a correspondent was excusable for confusing Liberalism and Judaism as the Liberal Party were now entirely in the hands of the Jews....

The most interesting feature of the situation is, however, the attitude of those Liberal papers, who have adopted a more lofty tone, and like the "Frankfurter Zeitung", warn Herr von Bethmann Hollweg ... [that] the only honourable course for him to pursue is to resign his post into stronger hands. These papers do not, however, suggest the name of any suitable successor. They declare that the reform must come either from above or below and appear anxious to impress upon their readers that in other countries grievances less than those which Prussians now bear have led to revolutions, and that it is incompatible with Prussian dignity and Prussia's claim to be a modern, progressive nation to suffer them quietly. When it is remembered how sensitive Prussians of the middle classes are to any imputation that they are less enlightened or modern than other peoples, and how strict their sense of duty is, when once it is pointed out to them, it does not appear impossible that, if no further attempts at reform be made, these and similar appeals to history may force the conviction upon them, that they are bound to imitate the action of other nations under similar trials and organize more violent demonstrations. In this

connection I would remind you of the Berlin Demonstrations in favor of universal suffrage which I reported in my despatch No. 60 of March 7th.

Meanwhile in the country districts the local squires boycott those tradesmen whom they suspect of hostile tendencies, and a similar policy is pursued, but with greater violence, by the Social Democrats in the towns.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/903; *BFO-CP*, reel 30, no. 2535.

Arthur C. Grant Duff to Sir Edward Grey, No. 43, Dresden (October 26, 1910)

Despite the SPD's unexpected strong showing in the Saxon Landtag elections of October–November 1909 – after introduction of Saxony's plural suffrage – a year later the Social Democrats have suffered defeat in two by-elections. The two contests reported here represented a trend: the Social Democrats lost a number of by-elections between 1909 and 1914.

I have the honour to report that two by-elections for the Saxon Diet [*Landtag*] have recently taken place one of which is of more than local interest.

On the 18th instant Dr. Zöphel¹⁸ a national liberal was elected as a deputy of the Diet for the Fifth Electoral District of Leipzig (known as Leipzig V). He received 10763 votes. His opponents were a social democrat for whom 7712 electors voted, a conservative and member of the [antisemitic] “Reformpartei” who received less than 2,000 votes respectively. The last election in the district occurred in 1909.¹⁹ The national

18 Georg Zöphel (1869–1953), a lawyer, businessman, and factory owner in Reichenbach, Saxony. In 1908 he was chairman of the Young National Liberal Association in Leipzig and treasurer of the party's state-wide organization; from October 1910 onward he was an executive member of the Association of Saxon Industrialists. He had represented the thirteenth urban *Landtag* district from 1907 to 1909.

19 In the general *Landtag* election of October–November 1909, the electoral district of Leipzig V was won by a National Liberal district court judge, Johannes Rudolph (1870–1910). His death on June 6, 1910, necessitated the by-election four months later. In this report Grant Duff does not differentiate between the number of *voters* who supported each candidate and the number of *ballots* they cast under the plural ballot system. This system massively disadvantaged Social Democratic candidates. In the 1909 general election, a run-off election in Leipzig V had pitted the National Liberal Rudolph against the Social Democrat Adolf Bammes, a warehouse-keeper associated with the SPD consumer cooperative in Leipzig-Plagwitz. More Saxons *voted*

liberals have gained nearly one thousand votes, while the diminution in the social democratic vote exceeds eleven hundred. A supplementary election was however rendered necessary.... This took place yesterday and resulted in an overwhelming victory for Dr. Zöphel who received 14,442 votes while the social democratic candidate only received 7,790.

An election took place on the 18th instant in the district of Plauen-Land in the South-West of the Kingdom (the 44th rural electoral district) and resulted in a victory for the conservatives whose candidate²⁰ received more than double the total of the votes cast for his national liberal and social democratic opponents. The conservative however obtained only a few more votes than were cast for his party at the election of 1909, while the national liberal vote was less by over 200, and the social democrats shewed a loss of exactly 500.

These elections are remarkable, as many persons believed that the social democratic vote would prevail in both these districts. The correspondent of the [liberal] *Berliner Tageblatt* in Leipzig confidently predicted a victory for the candidates of the party in question. It would appear as though the tide which has been recently flowing so strongly in favour of the social democrats were beginning to ebb at all events in Saxony. The parties of the Right, who presented candidates against the national liberal in Leipzig V, in the first election, voted solidly for him in the supplementary [run-off] election while the social democratic candidate failed to increase the number of votes cast for his party to any appreciable extent.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/907; *BFO-CP*, reel 32, no. 39511.

Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey, No. 276, Berlin (September 16, 1911)

At this year's Social Democratic Party congress in Jena, August Bebel outlines the party's strategy for the upcoming Reichstag elections. He also speaks to the party faithful about military spending and other election

for Bammes (54.2 per cent) than for Rudolph (45.8 per cent) in that run-off. But more of Rudolf's supporters were entitled to cast two, three, or four ballots each. When the ballots were counted, only 38.5 per cent were for Bammes; 61.5 per cent were for Rudolph, who thus won the seat by a considerable margin. The same inequity in the system of *Landtag* voting prevented Social Democratic victories in these and other by-elections from 1910 to 1914. Further details in James Retallack, "Mapping the Red Threat: The Politics of Exclusion in Leipzig before 1914," *Central European History* 49 (2016): 341–82.

- 20 Hermann Sammler (1852–1914), a fourth-generation farmer whose estate near Plauen was about twenty-five hectares (about sixty-two acres) in size; he held the district until his death on November 26, 1914.

issues. London's Foreign Office believes that the Catholic Centre and Conservative parties will use Germany's "humiliation" in the Second Moroccan Crisis of 1911 "for all it is worth" in the next elections, adding, "It will be interesting to see whether this cheval de bataille enables them to keep the seats they won from the Socialists in 1907." Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey notes Eduard Bernstein's speech about Anglo-German rivalry and writes, "A war with England is declared to be sheer madness."

I have the honour to report that, at the beginning of yesterday's session of the Social Democratic Congress at Jena, Herr Bebel proposed the following resolution: –

"The Party Congress expects that, in so far as it has not yet been done, the members of the Party will at once make their preparations to have a candidate of their own in every constituency where Social Democrats exist. The Congress further expects its members to make full use of the election agitation to win new members for the Party and new subscribers to the party press, and especially to work for the institution of universal, equal, secret and direct suffrage at all elections for the Landtag in Prussia and in the other States that do not yet possess it."

"In cases of second ballots [Bebel continued] where members of the party have to choose between two candidates of other parties, they may only give their votes to a candidate who binds himself to work or vote (1) for the maintenance of the existing Reichstag suffrage, (2) against any limitation of the right of unions, meetings and coalitions, (3) against any increased severity of the so-called political paragraph of the criminal law, (4) against any 'exceptional' law (aimed against Socialism), (5) against any raising of the import duties on articles of consumption for the masses and (6) against any new or increased indirect taxes on such articles of consumption. The candidate concerned must be asked to make his declaration before witnesses or in writing. If both candidates in the second ballot are willing to agree to these conditions the Liberal is to be preferred to the non-Liberal. In every other case the Social Democrats must abstain absolutely."

Herr Bebel's speech in proposing the resolution was very largely taken up with a fierce attack on the Centre Party. The other "bourgeois" parties came in for their share of blame but the Centre bore the brunt.... The Centre was always opportunist and could not be trusted – in one part of the country they worked with the Social Democrats and in another they were amongst their most violent enemies, and so on. The last elections, 1907, had been disastrous for the party – they lost 36 seats – but they had gained strength enormously since then and the Government and the "bourgeois", who gave vent to such shouts of triumph then were trembling at the prospect of the coming elections. He sketched the

short and inglorious career of the Conservative-Liberal [Bülow] “Bloc”, which was obviously doomed to failure from the first, and pointed out that the present Conservative-Centre Block, which was based on common ideas and common interests, was infinitely stronger and therefore infinitely more dangerous. He thought there would certainly be a new Navy Bill which the Centre and Conservatives would support with enthusiasm: that would mean further wild competition and shipbuilding between Germany, England and France and would lead to the most disastrous results. He also expected further heavy demands for the Colonies, particularly owing to the acquisition of French Congo; the customs tariff would soon expire and the Agrarians would of course demand higher duties: finally there were proposals for revision of the criminal law with the intention of limiting or abolishing the right of coalition etc. He begged his followers not to be too optimistic but to go into every fight even in safe constituencies with all their heart and soul: it was just as necessary to increase existing majorities as to win new seats....

After some debate of an uninteresting character the Resolution was carried unanimously.

The only other business of the Congress which seems worth reporting was a motion proposed yesterday afternoon by Herr [Eduard] Bernstein for the issue of a pamphlet which would explain to the masses the true situation with regard to the relations between Germany and England. He pointed out that their opponents would certainly try to turn the attention of the electors away from internal politics and more especially to the danger to Germany and German industry said to be threatened by England. People were constantly talking – not only in the Chauvinist press – about the probability of a war with England; this he considered sheer madness: there was merely competition between German and English industry and both countries were equally in need of peace to ensure their proper development. Even if England were to destroy the German fleet, she could not destroy the German workman, the German mines, iron-works and textile industry. He considered it most necessary to teach the people the true facts about all this and the Congress agreed and carried his motion unanimously.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/1127; BFO-CP, reel 36, no. 36459.

Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey, No. 1, Berlin (January 3, 1912)

Like most envoys stationed in Germany's other federal capitals, Ambassador Goschen reports from Berlin that the Reichstag elections currently

underway are dull. Non-socialist voters have been waiting for Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg to sound an election battle-cry they can rally around, as his predecessor did. Now a call to arms has been issued: voters are urged to help in the struggle to destroy Social Democracy at the polls. (A minute attached to Goschen's report describes the chancellor's message as "simply a manifesto against the Social Democrats.")

The electoral campaign in preparation for the Reichstag elections on the 12th instant has not produced anything of very general interest. It was interrupted to a certain extent by the Christmas holidays and is now entering on its final phase. It is impossible and useless to attempt to prophesy the result, but I may mention that, since I wrote my despatch No. 430 of the 13th ultimo, I have again seen some signs of an expectation of great gains on the part of the Social-Democrats and the Left.

The "patriotic" press has for some time been calling on the government to take an active part in the campaign and expressing its regret that Herr von Bethmann Hollweg has not followed the example set by Prince Bülow in his "New Year's Eve Letter" of 1907.²¹ Presumably in response to this clamour, the North German Gazette²² last night published a sort of communiqué or leading article on the forthcoming elections. The article points out that party strife and party recriminations have obscured the path for the electors and that there is no one great clear question put before them. The issue however was really clearer than would appear at first sight: the German empire had proved by the history of its social and economic development in the last forty years that there was no cause for pessimism....²³

Nevertheless [continued the Gazette] a deep shadow was cast on this cheerful picture by the attitude of the Social-Democrats who saw the welfare of their supporters in the destruction of the existing state of things. "It must be one of our most important tasks to put an end to this."

...

The Social Democrats refused their cooperation for these tasks and therefore the final subjugation of that party was a vital question for the Fatherland. No German who understood his duty could shirk giving his

21 On Bülow's "Sylvesterbrief," see Sir Frank Lascelles's report dated January 11, 1907.

22 *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (Berlin), on January 2, 1912; discussed in Jürgen Bertram, *Die Wahlen zum Deutschen Reichstag vom Jahre 1912* (Düsseldorf, 1964), 121–2.

23 The leading article also praised Germany's economic situation, social policy, trade treaties, protection of "national labour," and pursuit of peace.

vote on the 12th of January and he could be in no doubt against whom he had to fight.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/1370; BFO-CP, reel 37, no. 1148.

Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey, No. 6, Berlin (January 9, 1912)

Another report from Berlin describes the progress of the Reichstag campaign and continuing efforts by Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's government to unite all other parties against the Social Democrats.

I have the honour to report that the North German Gazette²⁴ of the 7th instant published a further short article on the forthcoming Reichstag elections.... This new article states that it was not the business of the Government organ to take sides with one or other of the various "bürgerliche" (non-Socialist) parties: its duty was to draw public attention away from party strife and direct it to the great tasks of the coming Reichstag and to show the position of the Social Democratic Party with regard to those tasks. Even if the Social Democrats had occasionally left their attitude of constant negation, they had invariably stood in more or less bitter opposition to the great legislative measures for the protection of the nation's work and the interior development of the Empire. They had especially always entirely failed in cases of measures for ensuring the state of defence of the Fatherland, for which the coming Reichstag too would have to take steps – probably very soon. It would be fatal for the development of the Empire if Social Democracy with its treasonable negative attitude in these fundamental questions, should ever obtain a controlling position. However, therefore, the differences between the "bürgerliche" parties might express themselves, one thing remained fixed, that no man who cared for the future of his country in these difficult times could give his vote to a Social Democrat either in the first or second ballot.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/1370; BFO-CP, reel 37, no. 1148.

Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey, No. 27, Berlin (January 19, 1912)

Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, reports Ambassador Goschen, has failed to rally the non-socialist parties to form a united front for the upcoming

24 Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung.

run-off ballots for the Reichstag elections. In London's Foreign Office, the following minute (dated January 22) comments on Goschen's report: "The strengthening of armaments is now taking the most prominent place among the matters to be dealt with by the new Reichstag. I gather that in the 2nd ballots, as far as results are known, the Socialists have made little progress, & that this is put down to non-support of socialist candidates by [left liberal] radicals, so perhaps the continued appeals of the gov't. have had some effect." See [table 15](#) comparing the results of Reichstag voting in 1907 and 1912.

I have the honor to report that the Imperial Government tried to arrange a conference three or four days ago between the leaders of all the non-Socialist parties in order to persuade them to conclude compacts for mutual assistance in the Second Ballots against the Social Democrats. This conference was however a failure as neither the National Liberals nor the Radicals sent representatives. These two latter parties have now made an arrangement to vote for each other's candidates in all second ballots where a National Liberal or Radical is opposed by a member of some other party. The Conservatives and Centre seemed to have made a similar compact.... So far as one can judge it seems that, as a general rule, the National Liberals will either vote against a Social Democrat or abstain, while the Radicals will in many cases at all events vote for him.

...

The Second Ballots are to take place tomorrow, on the 22nd and on the 25th instant.

Source: The National Archives, FO 371/1370; BFO-CP, reel 37, no. 1148.

Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey, No. 69, Berlin (February 9, 1912)

The following memorandum, forwarded without comment²⁵ by Ambassador Goschen to the Foreign Office, was written by Sir Francis Oppenheimer,²⁶ who barely one month before had become Britain's commercial attaché in the Berlin embassy. With a talent for viewing

²⁵ Lady Goschen died in February 1912.

²⁶ See John McDermott, "Sir Francis Oppenheimer: 'Stranger Within' the Foreign Office," *History* 66, no. 217 (1981): 199–207; T.G. Otte, "'Alien Diplomatist': Anti-semitism and Anti-Germanism in the Diplomatic Career of Sir Francis Oppenheimer," *History* 89, no. 2 (2004): 233–55. Oppenheimer's memoirs are entitled *Stranger Within: Autobiographical Pages* (London, 1960); see esp. ch. 13 on the Berlin embassy.

Table 15. Reichstag Elections in Saxony and the Reich, 1907 and 1912

	January 25, 1907			January 12, 1912		
	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)	Votes won (no.)	Votes won (%)	Seats won (no.)
Saxony						
Conservatives	92,206	10.6	3	90,793	9.7	2
National Liberals	225,034	26.1	6	204,235	21.9	1
Left Liberals	44,405	5.2	2	81,718	8.7	0
Antisemites	59,678	6.9	3	37,160	4.0	1
Agrarian League, Economic Union, etc.	18,548	2.1	1	3,424	0.4	0
Centre	4,643	0.5	0	2,573	0.3	0
Social Democrats	418,570	48.5	8	513,216	55.0	19
Total votes cast / seats	866,571		23	938,135		23
Voter turnout rate (%)	89.7			88.8		
Reich						
German Conservatives	1,060,209	9.4	60	1,126,270	9.2	43
Free Conservatives	471,863	4.2	24	367,156	3.0	14
National Liberals	1,637,048	14.5	54	1,662,670	13.6	45
Left Liberals	1,233,933	10.9	49	1,497,041	12.3	42
Antisemites	248,534	2.2	16	51,898	0.4	3
Economic Union, etc.	300,103	2.7	14	304,557	2.5	12
Centre	2,179,743	19.4	105	1,996,843	16.4	91
Social Democrats	3,259,029	28.9	43	4,250,401	34.8	110
Total votes cast / seats	11,303,537		397	12,260,626		397
Voter turnout rate (%)	84.7			84.9		

Source: Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 574 (and for explanatory notes).

Note: Some parties omitted for the sake of clarity.

commercial and political questions together – he had previously served for many years as consul general in Frankfurt am Main – Oppenheimer was well-informed about Germany's political parties, their possible alignments in the Reichstag, and the options those alignments opened up, or closed off, for government policy. Writing soon after the Reichstag elections of January 1912, Oppenheimer discusses economic questions, including tariff policy, the influence of Prussian agrarians, and Germany's export industries. But he also addresses at length the place of the Social Democratic Party in future parliamentary majorities. By outlining three scenarios, Oppenheimer's memorandum opens a window on German and British thinking about Germany's labour movement. Was the SPD already integrated into the German party system? If not, might it soon

be? Or did it really constitute – as its enemies claimed – a fundamental threat to the Empire’s stability and prosperity?

Enclosure in No. 1.

*Memorandum by Sir F. Oppenheimer respecting the Imperial Diet,
1912.*

Does its Constitution hold out any Hope of a Change of Policy in Economic Questions?

MUCH has been written about the recent election to the Imperial Diet – the first great struggle between Right and Left with an open chance of victory. The Left has gained a small majority.... My enquiries how the preponderance of the Left will affect the deliberations of the Diet ... have elicited some interesting points of view which are embodied in the following notes: —

1. The Majority returned.

The actual majority of the Left, as joyously greeted by its own press as it was significantly ridiculed by the organs of its antagonists, is modest indeed. It amounts to two or three votes [i.e., seats], possibly a couple more, when the election protests immediately lodged have been tried. This majority, meager in itself, is weak within because composed of very heterogeneous elements: Social Democrats, 110 [seats]; “Fortschrittliche Volkspartei,”²⁷ 43; National Liberals, 45. As a permanent working machine this combination must prove of practical failure.... An Imperial Government relying upon the Social Democratic vote would be contrary to all Prussian tradition, and must lead to the greatest difficulties in the Prussian Diet [*Landtag*], where the agrarian combination of the Conservatives and the Centre is still the support of the government.

If left to its own devices this lean majority of the Left is hardly likely to do much practical work. Its backbone is the Social Democratic contingent; the party which they represent has by the very election been carried into a more Radical current. The utterances of its press since the election hold out little hope that the party will depart from its utopian theories or from its intransigent attitude. The methods of this Radical group (so

27 Progressive People’s Party, the result of an amalgam of Germany’s principal left-liberal parties in 1910.

amazingly increased in the new Diet as a general result of the persistent agitation of its own party, and, in the second ballot, as a result of the political sympathy of the Liberals and of the anti-Liberal spite of the Right) are not likely to differ from the methods adopted by the Social Democrats in the old Diet. Some individual leaders no doubt deplore the general policy of negation, and would be inclined to work for positive results, but this parliamentary party as such is bound by the decisions of the majority, and its members are debarred from casting votes according to personal inclinations.

Most closely allied to this Extreme Left is the Progressive Popular Party ("Fortschrittliche Volkspartei"); in many questions, indeed in economic questions generally, it is prepared to make common cause with its Social Democrat neighbors.

Much less closely allied, but still a member of the Left, is the National Liberal group. It is doubtful whether its members will permanently adhere to the present majority. The National Liberal party, greatly dependent upon the leading and giant industrialists ("Gross-Industrie"), had since 1884 been closely allied with the Conservatives, and had proceeded on similar politico-economic lines. This understanding was in 1909 abruptly terminated over the financial reforms, and, as a result, the party as such, under the leadership of [Ernst] Bassermann, took up a determined stand upon the Left. Yet it was no secret that the important industrial elements within the party resented this move, and the growth of the Social Democratic vote will have justified this "fronde" – at least in its own opinion. These employers of labour have every reason to resent the growing political power of the workmen which makes for industrial war. It is true Bassermann, the leader of the National Liberal party, has since his election made a programmatic speech at Saarbrücken, which was strongly in favour of the continued alliance with the Left, but this much at least past experience has proved, that in the long run the National Liberals will not persist in strong opposition to the Imperial Government of the day; in the chief economic question – that of protection – they had never intended to abandon it.

2. A Working Majority.

Within the new diet there exists a second working majority, more promising for positive results than the majority of the Left, viz., a combination of the Centre, the Conservatives, and the National Liberals.

It would be constituted as follows: –

[Catholic] Centre proper	95
Followers ²⁸	27
National Liberals	45
Conservatives proper	43
Followers –	
Free Conservatives	16
Wirtschaftliche Vereinigung ²⁹	13
Unattached (Wilde) ³⁰	3
Total	<hr/> 242

This combination has a certain tradition in its favor, dating not only from Prince Bismarck's days, but also from the Chancellorship of several successors. There is every likelihood that the present Imperial Chancellor will attempt to derive from this combination the main support for his policy. The scheme is more difficult to realize to-day than formerly, because the National Liberals have moved very decisively to the Left, and they are at present less inclined to cooperate with the Conservatives and the Centre since Prince Bülow's financial reform, as originally devised, was thrown out by the Conservatives and Centre in the face of the National Liberal demands in regard to direct taxation. Yet it is very likely that if the Imperial Chancellor desires this majority, his endeavours will be greatly assisted by the attitude taken up by the Social Democrats. For, should the policy pursued by the Social Democrats culminate in a fruitless opposition as heretofore, the dormant tendencies among the National Liberal party will be awakened to action, and there will be a partial and growing return towards the Right. The National Liberals are keen on practical results, and will not in the long run allow themselves to be crowded out of any working majority by such ties as at present bind them to the Left. The National Liberals constitute a right wing of the Left, and have, so to say, the casting vote to turn the political scale either one way or the other.

3. *A Majority of Negation.*

Another majority might be affected by the combination of the Social Democrats with the members of the Centre and its followers, but this

28 Representatives of regional and ethnic minorities who usually voted with the Catholic Centre Party.

29 Economic Union – in 1912 including mainly members of the Agrarian League and the antisemitic German Reform Party.

30 Independents who joined no party caucus.

would be available chiefly for negating [*sic*] certain measures. The units of this combination would be: –

Social Democrats	110
[Catholic] Centre	95
Poles	18
Alsace-Lorraine	4
Welfen [Guelphs]	<u>5</u>
Total	232

Numerically, this combination would constitute an exceptionally strong force; its likelihood depends upon the attitude of the Centre, and the latter might from time to time be tempted into such an alliance because, assisted by the Social Democrats, it would be enabled to prevent the passing of any measures not to its liking. Its attitude would resemble that taken up in the Diet of 1903, which Prince Bülow dissolved in 1906 for that very reason. The contingency of this majority is the least palatable for the Chancellor's Government, because it would again accentuate the political importance of the Centre. The Government then will move carefully lest the Centre party be again driven into an attitude of dogged opposition, for this game of the Centre could be checkmated only by a rally of the whole Left – a move fraught with difficulty and danger in other quarters (Prussian Diet!), as shown above.

These then are, in broad outline, the three possible majorities within the new Diet. As the Imperial Chancellor is not responsible to the House, he can from time to time utilize any majority which he may deem most suited to his respective plans. If the possible legislative measures be grouped under definite headings, how are the different majorities most likely to be used?

For any constitutional reforms, there is available the majority of the Left; the Left will endeavor to achieve successes in that direction; it wants an electoral reform, a rearrangement of the constituencies, a government more truly constitutional, &c. But any such plans on the part of the Left, if at all advanced, would have to reckon with the opposition of the Imperial Chancellor himself and with that of the Bundesrat [Federal Council]. In these questions, then, even the united Left is not likely to prevail to any marked extent....

[*Oppenheimer then discusses national questions: the army, navy, colonies, and a new tax to cover such expenditures.*] A totally different Diet could only be obtained if, not the question of taxation, but the “national” question itself, were made the cause of a new electoral campaign,

more especially if the Government decided to issue a patriotic appeal, thus abandoning the reserve shown during the recent election. Such a plan, fraught with grave danger, does not appear in keeping with the political temper of the Imperial Chancellor now in office, though the Right is only too anxious to prompt it.

Social questions are not likely to occupy the Diet for some time to come, because the new insurance laws need time for digestion; for these questions the Government could rely upon the majority of the Left; perhaps the section of the Right (Centre) would even support the Government, and thus checkmate any too extreme demands made by the Social Democrats.

The prospects of any purely economic questions which are likely to occupy the new Diet are particularly interesting, because they reveal most clearly the fallacy of a real victory of the Left. There is little doubt that the Government could command a majority for the continuance of its traditional protective policy, either in its present extreme form or with even a further increase in the protective rates. In all these matters the old combination of the Conservatives and the Centre will be reinforced by the National Liberal vote, the latter party having throughout the election and in opposition to the other parts of the Left proclaimed “the protection of national labour” as its unalterable maxim. It is clear, then, that the National Liberals are the allies of the “*Fortschrittliche Volkspartei*” and of the Social Democrats only for the purpose of those economic questions which concern, so to speak, home affairs....

[Oppenheimer then discusses tariffs and commercial treaties further.]

...

The foregoing remarks may be summed up as follows: –

Besides the “majority returned” there are other combinations possible to yield majorities either to pass or wreck Government measures. The alternative “working majority” will probably come into operation more frequently than the “majority returned.” For the purposes of a straightforward change in the present economic system, the need for which has been, it is thought, brought home to the government by the increase of the Social Democrats, none of the majorities can be relied upon....

FRANCIS OPPENHEIMER

Arthur C. Grant Duff to Sir Edward Grey, No. 24, Dresden (July 2, 1914) (draft)

One month before the outbreak of the First World War, we find the British envoy in Dresden criticizing the Saxon government's decision to issue a new ordinance intended to restrict labour disputes and protect "black-legs" and "scabs" (strike-breakers).³¹ Grant Duff encloses a translation of the new ordinance (dated June 10, 1914 and issued by the Saxon Ministry of the Interior). The decree is so broad that it not only sanctions police action and the removal of pickets if they disrupt motorized or pedestrian traffic; police may intervene even if strike-breakers "annoy persons who are willing to work" or if they "assume a menacing attitude" (§4). He notes that in the next Landtag elections, scheduled for 1915 (but never held), the Saxon parties of the middle-left – the Radicals and National Liberals – hope to obtain an absolute majority in the Landtag (forty-six of ninety-one seats). They could do so only by taking nine seats away from the Social Democrats. But Saxon workers – already bitter and anxious to protect their rights – can be expected to cast opposition ballots (for the SPD) to protest this ordinance. Grant Duff's unstated conclusion is that Saxony faces possible political deadlock in the future.

For some time past statements have appeared in the press to the effect that the Saxon Government contemplated the issue of an ordinance in regard to "picketing" during industrial disputes. The intention of the Government to take such a step was at first denied by the official organs but latterly the attempts at denial have become feebler and the correctness of the surmise of those who declared that the appearance of such an ordinance was only a matter of time has been proved by the issue of an ordinance respecting the attitude of the police during industrial disputes (strikes, lockouts), on the 10th ultimo.

I have the honour to enclose a translation of the ordinance in question³² which is remarkable for the power which it places in the hands

31 German authorities rarely differentiated explicitly – in their language and in their legal codes – between persons who continue to work while others that they normally work with are on strike, on the one hand, and replacement workers brought into a workplace from outside, on the other. Moreover, German authorities and right-wing parties laid stress on "those willing to work" (*Arbeitswillige*) by praising the principle of "national work" (*ationale Arbeit*) in their propaganda. See Amerigo Caruso and Claire Morelon, "The Threat from Within across Empires: Strikes, Labor Migration, and Violence in Central Europe, 1900–1914," *Central European History* 54, no. 1 (2021): 86–111; more generally on strike-breaking and violence, see Caruso, *Blut und Eisen*.

32 The translation of the ordinance is found in the same Foreign Office file.

of the police who (§5) are authorized at their discretion to forbid the posting of pickets temporarily or “during the continuance of the industrial dispute” if pickets are directed to withdraw on account of annoying persons who are willing to work or others; or if a disturbance of public order is to be apprehended.

The wisdom of the step taken by the Saxon Government may be doubted. Many Conservatives even are of the opinion that the laws and ordinances hitherto in force are sufficient for the protection of persons who are willing to work. The liberals consider that Saxony has merely added to her already numerous police regulations and that the new measure will be of no advantage to employers while the work of the courts of law and of officials generally will be greatly increased. The feeling of bitterness which prevails amongst the industrial classes in the Kingdom will consequently grow in intensity and a weapon will be placed in the hands of the social democrats, of which they will not be slow to avail themselves.

Great efforts are being made to bring about a union between the national liberal and radical parties in view of the general election for the Saxon Diet which will take place next year and could they obtain forty-six seats the absolute majority would be theirs. But in order to attain to the number in question, it will be necessary for these parties to win nine seats from the social democrats, but it is universally agreed that they have not the slightest chance of doing so. On the contrary it is certain that the social democrats will be returned in greatly increased numbers. One of the Saxon Ministers told me some time ago that the social democrats may possibly hold forty seats [out of ninety-one] in the next diet. The action of the Saxon Government in issuing an ordinance respecting a matter in regard to which workers are very sensitive is certainly not likely to diminish the favourable prospects of the social democratic party.

Source: The National Archives, FO 215/62.

The last report sent from the British mission in Dresden before the First World War had nothing to say about Social Democracy. But implicitly it confirmed the opinion of French diplomats in Berlin: the mass of German workers would not stage a general strike to prevent war. Instead, they would shoulder their rifles and march to the front. Eyre Crowe's minute (July 31) attached to this telegram needs no elaboration: "This is decidedly ominous. Clearly, although Germany avoids the use of the word 'mobilization,' she is doing the thing."

Arthur C. Grant Duff to Sir Edward Grey, Telegram, No. 1, Dresden
(July 30, 1914)

I have just heard that (?100th and) [sic] 1st Grenadier regiment of the Saxon army has been ordered to the Silesian frontier and is leaving Dresden to-day.

Source: G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898–1914*, vol. 11, *The Outbreak of War: Foreign Office Documents June 28th–August 4th 1914*, ed. J.W. Headlam-Morley (London, 1926), 199.

Britons could not ignore the fate of Social Democracy across the North Sea after 1914 – during the First World War, during the revolutionary upheavals of 1918–19, or when the Social Democratic Party of Germany became a staunch opponent of Hitler before and after the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. Following the Second World War, the SPD contributed to Germany’s “economic miracle.” It rose to the challenge, in good ways and bad, of confronting a dictatorial regime in socialist East Germany. It supported reunification in 1990, even though its opponents in the Christian Democratic Union reaped the laurels. And it endured severe economic downturns after 2008 and 2020 to remain (albeit diminished) among Germany’s most important political parties in the third decade of the twenty-first century.

As the Edwardian age in Britain came to an end, none of these developments was on the horizon. British statesmen can be forgiven for viewing the SPD as just one among many cogs in the wheel of German domestic politics. German Social Democracy hardly seemed to merit the label “movement” any longer: seen through British eyes, it was now of interest only secondarily among other existential challenges facing the island nation.

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